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Government Publications

(61)

No. 186

Nº 186

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

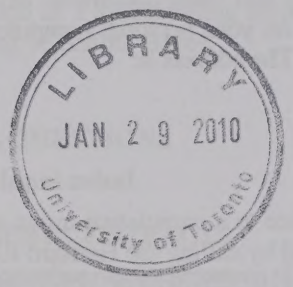
Première session, 39e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 16 November 2009

Lundi 16 novembre 2009



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 16 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 16 novembre 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have the pleasure of introducing a delegation from the wonderful city of Ferrandina, from the region of Basilicata, in the province of Matera, led by the mayor, Raffaele Ricchiuti: Counsellor Vincenzo La Guardia; Ingegnere Angelo Lisanti; Ingegnere Manny DiLecce, president of the Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada; the vice-president, Pat Tremamunno; secretary, Vince Primucci; and public relations, Danny Liberatore. I welcome them to Queen's Park in our beautiful province, and I hope they have a wonderful time.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I would like to introduce some guests in the gallery: Stacey Papernick, who is with the Ontario Nurses' Association; Dorothy Algar, who is a PSW and a bargaining unit president; Vicki Cunningham, who is also a PSW; Denise Murphy, who is a registered practical nurse; Stephanie Smith, a PSW; Lillian Marino, who is a supporter; and Andy Summers, who is the regional vice-president of ONA.

Il me fait également plaisir de vous présenter différents membres de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens. Je commence avec M. Conrad Mazerolle, qui est de mon conté; j'ai également Anne Vinet-Roy, qui est la vice-présidente et représentante de la FEO; il y a M^me^ Emilie Brochu, qui est la co-présidente de l'unité 62 de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens; nous avons Denis Bonin de Sturgeon Falls, qui est vice-président; M. Paul Baril, qui est sur l'exécutif de Hearst; M^me^ Caroline Brazeau, présidente de la section locale 103 de North Bay; et Sylvie Bédard, qui est de l'AEFO 60A de Cochrane. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. John Milloy: I think members will want to join me in welcoming, in the members' gallery, Herb Epp, the former member of this Legislature from Waterloo North, who served our community ably for many years. We welcome him to Queen's Park.

Interjection: And former mayor.

Hon. John Milloy: A former mayor of the city of Waterloo.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome back.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome Robyn Lin as a new page, and welcome her mom, Andréa Chun, and her sister, Tasha Lin, who are with us in the gallery. Welcome.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Il me fait plaisir de vous présenter des représentants de l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques : Carole Drouin, Dorothée Petit-pas, ainsi qu'une interne, Maegan Baird. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Margarett R. Best: Good morning. Today I would like to welcome the students from Cornell public school in the riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. They will be joining us shortly in the Legislature and the galleries.

Mr. Dave Levac: I have two delegations that have come to join us today from the riding of Brant, one in support of a page—Sean Stemler, Victor Levesque—and another one in terms of a very large charity event that they supported to have lunch in Queen's Park today: Lisa Meggs, Randy Meggs, Caelan Meggs, Susan Cross, Steve Cross, Syd Bolton, Chris Milmine, Pat Foley and Spencer Milmine. They are joining us today for the workings of Queen's Park. Thank you very much, and we enjoy their presence here.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It is my pleasure to introduce Cathy Steckle, who is in the members' gallery today, and her daughter Valerie is our new page today. You'll recognize the name Steckle as a longstanding member of Parliament from the riding of Huron–Bruce.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: The $7-billion sweetheart deal that your former Deputy Premier, George Smitherman, negotiated with Samsung caused cabinet leaks and news of an internal rift. Premier, what is it about this deal that had half your cabinet "gang tackle" George Smitherman?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is a great opportunity for me to speak about our Green Energy Act and the tremendous influx of investment it has created. One of the things we set out to do is to ensure that we—that is Ontario, the people of Ontario—stood head and shoulders above every single other North American jurisdiction. In six years we've gone from about 10 wind turbines to 670. They recently built, just outside of Napanee, the third-

largest solar farm in North America. That is just the beginning of an explosion of new investment that we're going to attract here in the province. It's about finding new opportunity in the green economy, creating green jobs and doing ever more so that we can shut down our coal-fired plants and produce a cleaner environment for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I think everybody heard about this gang tackle of your former Deputy Premier except, obviously, for the Premier himself. Let me tell you, Premier: Cabinet broke solidarity to speak out against this deal, quite frankly, because Premier McGuinty refused to ask the tough and uncomfortable questions that a Premier needs to ask of his ministers, particularly George Smitherman.

It looks like some of your cabinet wised up to Smitherman's ways after he wasted some $837 million in the eHealth boondoggle with sweetheart deals for Liberal friends. Or maybe the Premier heard from the Canadian Wind Energy Association, the Association of Power Producers of Ontario or others who said that a sweetheart deal was "manifestly unfair."

Premier, why don't you release the Samsung deal to the public so that taxpayers can decide if it's a fair deal or another giveaway as your minister went out the door?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Every day we learn more and more about what the leader of the official opposition stands against. Some day it would be nice to learn what he stands for. He now tells us he's against Ontario's Green Energy Act, which I can tell you is making —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs—it's not helpful.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We now know that the leader of the official opposition remains firmly planted in the 19th century. He stands opposed to the Green Energy Act. He is against any initiatives pursued by Ontario, collectively through their government, to pursue new opportunities in the green economy. We are moving ahead. We're moving ahead aggressively. We have the most proactive and aggressive legislation in all of North America. There's only one other place on this planet which is moving more quickly—and we're on the move—and that is Germany.

Again, I repeat: We are moving as quickly as we can to put in place more capacity when it comes to manufacturing our wind turbines and our solar farm materials, the kinds of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's the Premier who's stuck in the 19th century with backroom deals that make Tammany Hall look honest. CanWEA, APPrO and CanSIA wrote you on behalf of an industry that is investing billions of dollars in Ontario but were passed over so you could do a sweetheart deal with a Korea-based company. I'm here, Premier, to say that special sweetheart deals should not be required to achieve the province's energy needs, but the Premier keeps getting caught doing backroom deals rather than open tendering.

Premier, let me ask you this: Did you offer any other energy company the same sweetheart deal that you've given to Samsung?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't know what my honourable colleague is afraid of. We are prepared to do business with any company that approaches us and can settle on terms that are advantageous to the people of Ontario, whether that's Samsung or anybody else. One thing we are absolutely committed to doing is finding opportunity in the green economy to ensure we create more green jobs, whether that involves the greening of existing and traditional jobs or the creation of brand new green jobs; for example, installing and maintaining wind turbines. But more than that, we want to put in place capacity so that we can build wind turbines and solar panel materials, so that we can export those to the United States and other parts of Canada. Therein lies tremendous opportunity in the green economy for Ontarians.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier on the same topic: The PC caucus isn't afraid. We're simply worried about a Premier who would rather negotiate shady backroom deals on something as important as our energy supply. Then I'll ask the Premier: If this is not a shady deal, would the Premier tell us who he and his former Deputy Premier have met with from Samsung to negotiate this deal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the continuing interest on the part of my honourable colleague when it comes to us aggressively prosecuting the Green Energy Act. It would have been nice to have had their support at the time when we introduced the legislation and it became law in the province of Ontario. But now I gather he wants us to find other ways to involve more people. What I say to the leader of the official opposition is, if he's aware of any business that wants to do business with the province of Ontario, wants to get on board when it comes to building a new and stronger green economy, then we're open to his suggestions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, what the industry associations have said about your shady deal is that it "appears to allow the government to direct long-term power purchase agreements and significant transmission capacity to a single company." One would expect that before picking a foreign-based company for a sweetheart deal, the Premier would have met with company representatives to work out the details. But no one from Samsung is registered with the lobbyist registry, not even company executives.

We know the Premier has made it a habit of breaking his promise to stop sole-source sweetheart contracts, but why is the Premier also breaking the lobbying law?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The purpose of the Green Energy Act, as you well know because we stated this in the Legislature many times over, is to create new jobs. In fact, our commitment is to create 50,000 jobs in the next three years in domestic manufacturing and assembly, architecture, construction, trucking, servicing and installation, financing, engineering, electricians, inspectors and computer software and hardware.

My honourable colleague tells us that he's somehow concerned about the implication this will have for domestic business. The single most important thing that we can do to strengthen this economy and create jobs is to put in place a harmonized sales tax, so I would ask my honourable colleague to stand up and do something that is admittedly difficult for that party, which is to lend their support for the HST in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, this is not about the Green Energy Act; it's about the transparency and the integrity of billion-dollar contracts for our energy future, issues the Premier no longer seems to care about, because the Premier knows the energy industry was caught by surprise when the Premier and his former Deputy Premier, George Smitherman, abandoned them to seal this deal with Samsung. They warned you that this foreign-based company has little experience in renewable energy generation and development in our province. The news that no one is registered with the lobbyist registry moves this deal from suspect to shady.

Premier, is this one of the many reasons why your cabinet lost confidence in George Smitherman?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we're very proud of the work that we continue to do as a government and proud of the leadership demonstrated by Minister Smitherman when he served in his capacity as Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Our commitment is to create 50,000 new jobs in the green energy sector and to do that as quickly as we can. If there's any company anywhere in the world which wants to approach us and has some kind of an offer or proposal with respect to doing business, of course we're going to sit down with them, and if we can come to terms that are advantageous to the people of Ontario, then of course we will do that; that is what is expected of us.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians are struggling through a deep recession. This government's cure: a new tax on gasoline and home heating. By this time next year, if the McGuinty government has its way, Thunder Bay seniors Anne and Milton Marion will be paying 8% more on their $600 heating bill.

Why is this Premier ramming through a new tax that will make Anne and Milton Marion's life so much less affordable?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question, I really do, but I would rephrase it a little bit. "Why do poverty groups and food banks support our package of tax reforms?" I think is a good way to put the question.

I think it's important to keep in mind that under our package of tax reforms, 93% of Ontarians will get a permanent tax cut. That takes effect in January of this coming year, by the way. The average family with an $80,000 income will see a 10% tax cut in their personal income taxes; 90,000 low-income Ontarians will no longer pay any personal income tax. And here's an important example: A single parent on social assistance with two children will save over $1,200 under our tax plan.

This is about helping all Ontarians, but we pay particular heed to those in low-income groups.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For every dollar the HST will cost consumers, only 18 cents are being returned through income tax cuts, and this Premier knows it.

Wherever I travel in the province, I hear worried Ontarians who are talking about the HST. In fact, Rich Whitehead from St. Catharines said this: "Five years ago I worked one full-time job 10 kilometres from home and struggled to make ends meet. Now, having lost that job, I drive to Mississauga to work one full-time job and race home to work a second part-time job in the evenings. I have trouble paying for things like groceries and utilities. We've cut back in every way we can ... there's not even enough for necessities. You're kicking me while I'm down. The HST will hurt my family."

Why is this Premier kicking Ontarians like Rich when they're down?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to draw to my colleague's attention a very important report that was released recently by Dr. Jack Mintz. It was peer-reviewed by four economists, including Don Drummond and Jim Stanford of the CAW, so we've got quite a spectrum there in terms of economists who've looked at it. What Dr. Mintz said is that because of our package of tax reforms, over the course of the next 10 years, 591,000 more jobs will be created than otherwise would have been the case.

Fundamentally, this is about jobs. It's about ensuring that gentlemen like the one referred to by my colleague have the opportunity to earn a good living, to enjoy a good standard of living and to look at his kids with a sense of pride, knowing they're making it on their own. This is about building more jobs in the province of Ontario and it's about building a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last year, Jack Mintz said that the HST was going to kill up to 40,000 jobs a year, and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce agrees. In fact, the finance minister said that Jack Mintz was nothing but an Alberta academic whose ideas simply don't work. What a change of heart, all of a sudden.

Here's what I care about: I care about what Roger and Monique Byrne from eastern Ontario say about the HST. I care about what they say about the HST, and here it is:

"We live in a rural area where it is necessary to drive to our jobs. Please do not add to our already stretched ... budget."

1050

Sue Vellinga, from the GTA, says this: "As somebody that has lost their job due to the terrible economy of Ontario, I think this would be a huge mistake."

Brenda Moore adds: "I'm a single mom. I hold two jobs. I think this is absolutely terrible."

Why isn't the Premier listening to Ontarians like Brenda, Monique, Rich and Sue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it is newsworthy when the head of the NDP in Ontario abandons food banks and poverty groups who are in support of our package of tax reforms. This is what they said at the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction in response to our budget: "This budget has moved the bar forward on housing, tax credits and child benefits in ways that will make a tangible difference in the lives of many Ontarians."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East will come to order when asked, please.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What we're doing, through the budget, is paying close attention to the needs of our low-income earners by providing them with special benefits—in many cases, eliminating them from the tax roles entirely—and at the same time giving special supports to our businesses so they can grow stronger, so that we can create, over the course of the next 10 years, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 600,000 more jobs.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier as well. The Premier is asking Ontario families to pay more for daily essentials—home heating, hydro, gas for the car—and at the same time, he is telling them to brace for closed emergency rooms and funding cuts. If people are going to be paying more than ever before in this province, why are they getting less from their government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is not prepared to accept a fundamental precept of Ontario history: We have always come together during difficult times; we have always done whatever is necessary to build an ever-stronger province.

Today, what we are going to do is ensure that we maintain the economic capacity in the province of Ontario to continue to fund good schools for our children and their children, to continue to fund good health care for our children and their families, to continue to fund good and strong environmental supports for our children and their families.

What I'm saying is, this is not an easy thing for us to do, but we have always, as a society, built good schools to serve all of us, built good health care to serve all of us and built a strong economy that delivers good jobs for all of us. This is about all of us. My friend opposite believes it's just about the individuals; it's about the individuals doing something together for all of us, a stronger economy and a brighter future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For every dollar this government takes from consumers in new sales taxes, they're going to be handing out $1.06 in corporate tax giveaways. To Ontario families, the Premier says, "These are tough times. You'll have to pay more, while your emergency rooms close."

Why is the Premier hitting Ontario families with a new tax that makes life more expensive, while handing out billions and billions of dollars in tax cuts to profitable corporations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know it's an old saw for the NDP: "Corporations bad; all corporations bad." I just don't think that washes anymore, especially in an era of globalization.

I think my honourable colleague does understand deep in her heart that it's very important, in a jurisdiction that has an economy that is so export-driven like Ontario, that we ensure that our exporters, particularly our manufacturers, can be competitive in an era of globalization. We have to help them get their costs down. That's what the HST is all about: It's about ensuring that we have a strong manufacturing sector here that can grow and create more jobs.

The very people my honourable colleague purports to stand up for are dependent upon those corporations getting stronger and those businesses getting stronger, growing and creating more jobs. This is about 600,000 more jobs; it's about a bright future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It does nothing for the struggling corporations, and that's a fact. The struggling corporations aren't going to be getting anything from this; it's the profitable corporations that are going to win big on this tax change.

But do you know what? Jobless numbers in this province continue to creep up—everywhere I go, people tell me that they are worried—and instead of practical solutions, Ontario families are getting a new, job-killing tax on gasoline and home heating, and what else? They're told to brace for cuts.

But there are winners in the Premier's plan; there are obvious winners: a $2-billion corporate tax giveaway to profitable corporations and $1 million a day for high-flying consultants in the province.

Why are the concerns of everyday Ontario families and small businesses at the bottom of the Premier's list of priorities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the representation, but I can't agree. I've got to keep coming back to this because I think it's salient. Why do poverty groups and food banks support our package of tax reforms? They're doing that because they understand the package in its entirety. They know that we're going to take people who are paying income tax now, 90,000 of those in the

lowest income levels, to ensure they're no longer paying it. We're talking about doing something like a single parent on social assistance with two children saving over $1,200 under our tax plan.

Most importantly for all of us, this is about creating 600,000 more jobs over the course of the next 10 years than otherwise would have been the case. It's about making an effort now to build a bright future—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. Jason Grier is George Smitherman's former chief of staff and current riding president. Mr. Grier also is the vice-president of a national lobby firm where he bills himself as a specialist in infrastructure, health and energy procurement—all Mr. Smitherman's old files. Over the past three years, Mr. Grier was registered to lobby your government, including Mr. Smitherman.

What is the total amount of taxpayer money that was spent on deals between Mr. Smitherman and his top fundraiser/riding president?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to rephrase that question and not be specifically drawing a member in and impugning motive.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Premier, what is the total amount of taxpayer dollars that were spent between the Minister of Health, Infrastructure and Energy, and Mr. Grier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The honourable member alleges that because there is an individual who works on a riding association that there's somehow something unfortunate with that. There is a lobbyist at Strategy Corp. who is the first VP of the Ontario Conservative Party. There is a senior executive at Edelman who is the CFO and treasurer of the Ontario Conservative Party. There are a number of Conservative riding association presidents who are advocates or lobbyists on particular issues, including funding private religious schools.

We encourage all Ontarians to get involved in the political process, and if that includes serving on a riding association, that's something that we support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In two years those people might have to lobby us, because we'll be in government when your sorry government is thrown out. But we know Mr. Smitherman—we know he had a reputation for handing out sweetheart deals, and he handed Grier's clients over 100 million in taxpayer dollars.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I must have gotten their goat, but they didn't hear, I don't think, properly: $100 million went to Mr. Grier's clients. Those clients included Emergis, Merck Frosst, Abbott Laboratories and others. They all received $100 million, total, in contracts when Mr. Smitherman was at the helm. If Mr. Grier knocked on Mr. Smitherman's door, then his loyalties were divided between two people: one, looking out for his clients' interests by getting them government contracts; secondly, looking after Mr. Smitherman's interests as his top fundraiser.

I have a question for the Premier. What have you done about the cozy and suspect deals totalling more than 100 million taxpayer dollars?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll name the program my colleague is reluctant to name: It's the Gardasil funding program. It's a three-year program funded by the federal government, aimed at vaccinating grade 8 girls against HPV. This is what my friend is complaining about. We're proud of that program. We think it's a benefit to our families that'll particularly benefit the young women, grade 8 girls.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Before the last budget, the Minister of Finance commented on Alberta-based Professor Jack Mintz's budget proposals. To quote the Minister of Finance, this is what he had to say: "We don't agree with Mr. Mintz.... That old neo-conservative attitude didn't work."

Why is the minister now embracing Professor Mintz and that old Conservative attitude?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite knows—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite knows that the reference was about something other, another piece of work that Mr. Mintz had done. Mr. Mintz last week released a study that looked at this government's budget. It studied that budget and concluded a number of things, first and foremost that the government's plan will create 591,000 net new jobs over the next 10 years. Mr. Mintz also concluded that it will raise family incomes and individual incomes over the 10 years.

I remind the member opposite that it was peer reviewed by a number of economists of all political stripes, including Jim Stanford of the CAW, and they all concluded what that member and his party won't acknowledge: that this government has a plan for job creation. It has a plan to get this economy back on its feet. It's no longer about the old bromides and the false rhetoric.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: In an earlier study, Professor Mintz said that harmonization would stifle job growth. Another study sponsored by the chamber of commerce found the same, and other studies anticipate job losses in home building and tourism, but the McGuinty government paid Professor Mintz to issue a new report, a report other economists have dismissed as "pretty dubious." I realize the minister paid his new best buddy good money for a new report wherein he was paid to change his mind, but does this minister really expect us to buy that old neo-conservative analysis?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: You'd be surprised who has in fact hired Mr. Mintz; it's amazing what my friend Mr. Bradley finds in the boxes in his office. It turns out that the NDP government hired Mr. Mintz in 1993, and what was his advice offered on? It was offered—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Mintz is a well-regarded economist. I have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Mintz is a well-regarded economist who says that we are going to create 591,000 net new jobs with this plan. His work has been peer-reviewed and his work has been used by the New Democratic Party and used by the Conservative Party. We don't agree with him on everything, but this study—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. My constituents are concerned. They're hearing from the Conservatives and from the NDP that the harmonized sales tax will kill jobs at a time when we need them most. Recently, Jack Mintz—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I just want to remind the member, as he begins that question, that I have delivered a couple of statements in the House recently about use of language. Specifically, I made it clear that it's not acceptable to make allegations either directly or indirectly of any member of the House. I just want to remind the members from the government side that making assertions or asserting misrepresentations from another party and setting up the member to do the same will not be tolerated.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Recently, Jack Mintz, former president and CEO of the C.D. Howe Institute and at the University of Calgary, released a report regarding the HST's effect on Ontario's economy. The report confirms that, as a result of this comprehensive tax package, within 10 years Ontario would see an estimated 591,000 additional new jobs, increased capital investment of $47 billion and an 8.8% increase in overall annual worker incomes. This report was reviewed and endorsed by prominent and respected Canadian economists from the financial, academic and labour sectors.

Minister, who should we believe on this: those who are playing politics with Ontario's economic future or a group of Canada's leading economists?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank Dr. Mintz for doing the report because what he was able to do, after we introduced the budget in March, was to look at the entire package of tax reforms that we introduced.

I know that my good friend the Minister of Finance will be introducing a bill that will see some $15 billion worth of tax relief for people and businesses over the next three years, and I would think that all members would want to vote in support of providing some $15 billion worth of income tax stimulus to our economy.

What Dr. Mintz was able to do, looking at the entire package—not just part of it but the entire package—is to predict, as the member was saying, that we will see an increase of 591,000 net new jobs in the province of Ontario and that we will see some $47 billion worth of more investment in our province and a rise of real income by as much as 8.8%. That's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Over the past months I've met with many constituents who have questions about our tax reform package. Ratepayers, condo owners and seniors in particular all have concerns about how the reforms will affect them. At the same time, they understand and appreciate that in order to compete and recover we need to take bold action to attract investment and jobs in Ontario. I fully support an initiative that strengthens our economy and the prosperity of Ontario families.

This afternoon, Minister Duncan will be introducing legislation that proposes significant personal income tax cuts; 93% of Ontarians will receive a personal income tax cut to the tune of $10.6 billion; 90,000 Ontarians will no longer have to pay personal income tax; and by cutting the lowest income tax bracket by 17%, it will make it the lowest in Canada. Minister, how will these tax cuts affect the people of Ontario and those in my riding of Mississauga South?

1110

Hon. John Wilkinson: What this economy and what our province need is more jobs. Because of this global economic recession, which didn't start in this province or this country—it has affected families. They have lost their jobs, and we need to give them hope by having a new tax reform package in this province—the first substantial tax reform of sales tax since 1961, designed specifically to make sure that our businesses are more competitive on the world stage, because frankly that's exactly where we compete today; 80% of what we manufacture in this province is exported outside of this province. So it is important to give our businesses that competitive advantage, because what it means for families is that there will be 591,000 more families in the province of Ontario that will be able to tuck their kids into bed at night knowing that mom or dad has a job and that there is a brighter future for them. We have tax measures that are designed specifically to make sure that this reform is very progressive, and I look forward to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, Jason Grier has been very successful as George Smitherman's top fundraiser.

Over the past two years, Grier helped raise almost a million dollars for George Smitherman. That's three times more than the next-best fundraiser among the Liberals and 10 times more than the fundraiser for the Premier himself.

How much did Grier raise from clients who got government contracts from former minister George Smitherman?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There's always a lot of fun to be had in opposition when you go on these speculation missions. I just don't believe they add much to the public interest.

What I do think adds to the public interest is that any Ontarian who chooses to get involved in the political process helps strengthen our democracy. Obviously that's something that Mr. Grier has done in the past. The accusation they made a moment ago was that he was involved in getting the government to spend money.

In fact, it was the federal government who spent the money; they spent it on Gardasil, which is an important medication that is aimed at vaccinating grade 8 girls against HPV. We think that was an important and well-justified use of federal taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: This is not speculation. While Smitherman awarded more than $106 million in taxpayers' money to Grier's clients, the clients donated large sums to Smitherman's and the Liberal Party's coffers. For example, Emergis contributed over $9,000, while Abbott—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need any help from the government House leader, thank you very much. For that, stop the clock, please.

I just ask the honourable member to be cautious in his words of impugning motive. As well, I've let this go to a degree, but I think we need to be cautious that we do refer to members by their riding names.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Abbott Laboratories contributed over $10,000. Merck Frosst gave over $17,000. Premier, you promoted former minister George Smitherman, member from Rosedale, to your elite budget committee on Saturday, then you accepted his resignation the very next day. Is it because you discovered former minister Smitherman was for sale?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sorry, Speaker. Is it because you—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague tells us something about what he claims are contributions to a particular riding association. I don't have the facts and figures with me here to tell me how much those same companies contributed to the Conservative Party. If they did, that would not be a bad thing; that's how the democratic system works.

But again, I'm not clear as to why my colleague opposes a three-year program funded by the federal government aimed at vaccinating grade 8 girls against HPV. We think that was a good use of taxpayer dollars, even if those were federal taxpayer dollars.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour le premier ministre. This morning, people from Port Perry have joined us for question period. They are the personal support workers and nurses who provide the personal care and support to residents at the community nursing home in Port Perry, and they are being laid off. They are here today because they want you to stop the major cuts to their residents' care.

Premier, before you pat yourself on the back and talk about past investments, why, in spite of these investments, are we seeing layoffs and reduced care for frail elderly in our long-term-care homes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know that all members of the House agree that caring for our precious seniors or our people who are in long-term-care homes is one of our true responsibilities as a government.

We remain committed to improving the quality of care when it comes to long-term-care homes. I know that my colleague the member from Nipissing did some excellent work in this regard, and we've continued to build on that. When it comes to the quality of care in our long-term-care homes, we remain committed to it.

I look forward to the supplementary, where we can discuss that a little bit more.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: How can we improve quality of care in long-term-care homes when staff are being laid off? A total of 250 hours of personal and nursing care will be gone each and every week because those people are being laid off.

The home is already struggling to provide the care that the residents need, and soon there will be 34 fewer minutes of hands-on care for each of those residents. That's less time for bathing, toileting and feeding, and the list goes on.

Will the minister reassure the patients, their families and the staff that the money that has been invested will go to care, not to profit, and that it will halt the layoff of those important health care providers?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am more than happy to look into the case of this particular home, but I can tell you that we are increasing staff capacity. We're adding 2,500 more PSWs and 2,000 more nurses. We've already raised the level of daily care to 3.26 hours, and we're working toward raising it even further, to 3.5 hours, by 2011. We're also building more capacity. We're building new homes, and we're improving those that already exist, those that are old.

I can tell you that our record speaks for itself. We've increased funding for long-term care by over $1 billion—that's a 50% increase—and we've funded 6,100 new full-time staff, including 2,300 nurses, who are delivering 11.9 million more hours of hands-on care.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. On Friday we heard that the list of priority groups eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine has been expanded to include all children aged 13 and under, and adults 65 and older with underlying health conditions. This is welcome news for parents in my riding who have been anxious to get their children vaccinated. They urgently want to protect their families from the spread of this virus.

The expansion, however, does not include children over 13, the kids in high school. This could prove to be inconvenient for families who have children in both elementary and high schools, as they would not be able to take them to get their vaccine at the same time.

Minister, please explain to the families in my riding and throughout Ontario why only children 13 and under have been added to the priority groups at this time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member is right: We want to protect Ontarians from H1N1 as quickly as we possibly can. However, as long as the supply of vaccine that we're getting from the federal government is limited, we simply must roll out our vaccination program in phases. This strategy ensures that those who need the shot the most get it first.

I think every parent in this province can agree that we want to protect our kids from H1N1. That's why we recently announced that we are opening up the vaccine program to all kids aged 13 and under. The decision was made based on available supply of vaccine. We don't yet have enough to vaccinate children of all ages, and we need to protect young children, who are most at risk.

I certainly understand the concerns of parents who want to vaccinate all their kids, and I can assure them that as we get more supply, we will roll out the vaccine to more groups, including older children.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I know that Ontario parents will be relieved to know that their children can now be immunized against the flu, starting this week.

But Ottawa has a vaccine shortage and has temporarily stopped public clinics until it receives more vaccine, which is worrying for many of my constituents. Parents in my riding will want to get their children vaccinated, but they can't do that if the clinics are not open. There are also still others in the priority group who have not yet received their vaccine. I understand Ontario receives the vaccine from the federal government and that we will get more very shortly.

My question for the minister is, has this vaccine been received yet, and when will Ottawa's portion be delivered so that they can restart clinics for our kids and other priority groups to get protected from H1N1?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This week, Ontario's allocation of vaccine is 414,000 doses of the adjuvanted vaccine, and we have hopes that we will get an additional 272,500 later in the week. We have received the bulk of the 414,000 doses, and workers at the government pharmacy are busy repackaging the vaccine for distribution today.

I understand the concerns of the member and the parents in his riding. It's unfortunate that Ottawa was short on supply and had to temporarily stop the public clinics for a couple days, but I'm pleased to be able to report that we're shipping out 30,000 doses to Ottawa this morning and will be shipping more vaccine to Ottawa as soon as we get it—hopefully, more this week.

I'm hopeful that, with this supply, Ottawa will be able to restart their public clinics as soon as possible and begin to immunize children. In the meantime, of course, many parents are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Premier. The eHealth scandal has cost you a second minister, Premier. Now that George Smitherman is out of cabinet, now that the member for Toronto Centre—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the honourable members to use riding names, please.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Now that the member from Toronto Centre is out of cabinet, he doesn't have to answer who got rich off taxpayers' money, how they are connected to the McGuinty Liberals and why a senior public civil servant who blocked the auditor's investigation wasn't disciplined.

The $837 million wasted, member for Toronto Centre, wasn't their money, wasn't your money; it was the hard-earned money of Ontario taxpayers. Why are you rejecting our call for a public inquiry and standing in the way of the public knowing who misspent their money?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Ontarians expect their tax dollars to be spent wisely. So do I, and so does our government. That's why we have moved forward to enthusiastically embrace the recommendations of the Auditor General. We have greatly reformed our procurement policies. This is the right thing to do. I thank the Auditor General for making the case that it's something we should do. We've curtailed unnecessary expense claims. We have additional mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

It's very important to acknowledge that we are proceeding with the implementation of eHealth. It's critical to the sustainability of our health care system that we embrace the technology through eHealth. That's why we're expanding the number of doctors who will have access to

eHealth technology. We know that patients get better care—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You know that you tied the Auditor General's hands during the inquiry. The Premier knows who got rich off taxpayers' money, because the McGuinty Liberals did the deals. The Ontario taxpayers who are footing the bill for the billion-dollar boondoggle don't know.

I'll be introducing the eHealth Ontario Spending Accountability Act later this week. Will the Premier tell his caucus to give swift passage to my bill and order the public inquiry now?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The successes at eHealth are significant. All of our hospitals are now filmless. The day of the old X-ray films is over. All of that imaging is done digitally. This is of better quality and much less expensive for us. We have four million Ontarians already with electronic health records, and we're moving to bring in six million more over the next three years.

We have a drug profile viewer in our emergency room, so that emergency room physicians can very quickly find out what drugs have been prescribed to a patient in their emergency department. These would include patients who are recipients of the Ontario drug benefit plan—so our seniors, our people with disabilities and people on social assistance and so on.

The RFQ for our diabetes registry closed on August 28, and those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Finance. As the minister should know, Windsor is a hard-hit community. The unemployment rate there is nearly 14%. Since last December, almost 10,000 jobs have disappeared. Tourism is a key sector in Windsor.

My question is this: Why is the minister bringing in a new tax on gasoline, hotels, air, train and bus travel?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The job creation plan that we put forward in the budget will create 591,000 net new jobs. Why doesn't she answer why she doesn't support the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association, who says that this will allow them to produce more vehicles in Ontario? Why doesn't she quote the tourism industry, who is supporting this plan with a whole package of changes we made? Why? Because she doesn't want to tell the whole story.

You know, when she takes the unemployed in my home community and uses them for cheap political fodder in this Legislature, she ought to be ashamed—just like when she opposed us helping the auto industry several months ago. In fact, we put together a package that will create jobs in 10 years. It is supported by the automotive sector and supported by many other industries that employ people in my community. That's why we're doing it. It's about jobs, sir. It's not about sitting back and doing nothing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: British Columbia's council of tourism associations estimates that the move to the HST there will cost 5,200 direct tourism jobs and will take a 545-million-dollar bite out of the provincial economy each and every year. Ontario's tourism sector is much larger than BC's and employs more than 200,000 people, including thousands in the Windsor area.

Why is this minister plowing ahead with a tax that will surely kill even more jobs in hard-hit Windsor?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have a whole package of reforms that are aimed at helping the tourism sector. We've been working with the tourism sector.

What this tax will do, what this package will do, according to independent advice, is create 590,000 net new jobs in the next 10 years. That's why the vehicle manufacturers support it. That's why the forestry sector supports it. That's why a range of other business groups support it. The other reason, the other part of this package, which the member conveniently ignores, is that those people that have suffered the most in my community will pay less in taxes. Those people that are getting their jobs back, those people that are back to work in the auto plants today—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That's why the food banks have supported the policy. That's why she ought to listen to Hugh Mackenzie, who I know has spoken to her on numerous occasions. That's why the NDP's Fair Tax Commission suggested doing this some years ago.

This is the right package to create jobs for communities like Windsor. This party is seizing the future. That party is locked in the past. This is about jobs. It's about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ROYAL AGRICULTURAL WINTER FAIR

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, yesterday marked the conclusion of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Every year I visit that fair and every year I see the excitement there. The fair, with its focus on agriculture and rural life, provides those in the urban areas of Toronto and the GTA a real chance to experience life in the agricultural sector.

Minister, can you share with us what, from your point of view, were some of the highlights of the fair, and how did the fair showcase agricultural and rural life here in Ontario?

1130

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to respond to this, first of all to thank the organizers, all of those involved at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair for the excellent job that they do to put on a show every year when the country comes to the city.

Those of us from rural Ontario think it's very important that our urban customers, if you will, have an understanding and an appreciation of the significance of the agriculture industry, that industry that feeds us. Also, anyone who visits the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair would see a number of initiatives that are supported by the provincial government, some in partnership with the federal government: the Growing Forward campaign, they can get information about the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, the Pick Ontario Freshness—there are lots of booths there that are promoting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, events of this size bring in really big tourist dollars to local economies. The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair certainly did. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people come to the Royal. It provides an economic boost to Toronto and the GTA. Restaurants, hotels, retail shops and entertainment venues are patronized while attendees are visiting the city.

Minister, can you give us some more information on what we expected in terms of numbers of attendees and the economic impact on the local economy?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Again, I think it's very important for members of this House and all the people of Ontario to understand how important this event is in educating all people in Ontario about the significance of the agriculture industry in the province. I commend not only the organizers but the schools that last year there were 500 schools that had students come to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. There are over 300,000 visitors to this fair annually, where they can see the very best of rural Ontario showcase what they do. It's also an advantage for those in the agriculture industry who participate in the competitions at the fair. When they win, it makes their product—whether it's meat, animals, vegetables or whatever—more marketable. It has more value to them. So there's no question that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Ministry of Government Services. Minister, as of February 2010, Ontarians can buy a licence plate bearing the distinctive Support Our Troops yellow ribbon logo. This is a good idea that was already introduced by my good friend and colleague Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North. His private member's resolution asked that the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation support our troops by incorporating the yellow logo on the licence plates. The disappointing part of this, Premier, is the fact that you've turned this into another tax grab; a good idea—now it's a tax grab. Minister, can you explain how much this new Support Our Troops logo is going to cost?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I am very proud of our Canadian troops and the outstanding work they do all over the world and inside Canada. It is important for us to take any opportunity to showcase their work and raise awareness about the kind of work they do all over the world, and we are very, very pleased to partner with the Canadian Forces personnel assistance fund on the new yellow ribbon graphic plates to raise awareness and show support for our troops. Ontarians will be able to purchase, as the member said, vehicle plates with the yellow ribbon logo from Service Ontario beginning on February 1, 2010. Like any other charity, the Canadian Armed Forces applied to the graphic licence program, which has been in place since 1994, and we have used the standard ways to pay royalties to all the charities. The NDP government has done it, the Conservative—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: So I thought, at the True Patriot Love event, which was held last week on Remembrance Day eve, it was rather cynical of the Premier to introduce this motive that night. However, the article in the Toronto Sun brings out the real points for a reality check: What is the cost of the new plates? While we all know that the personalized plates are $314 and the other plates are $77, what you're actually going to give to the Canadian Forces personnel assistance fund is $2 or $4. Where is the 98% of the new revenue from this source going? Is it going to fund programs or is it going to fund the troops?

Minister, my question is, when drivers decide to buy this new yellow licence plate, are they really supporting the troops or are they supporting Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's really unfortunate that they are trying to politicize a very good idea to support and create awareness for our armed forces.

Let me just read what the Department of National Defence has to say: They are pleased to have engaged in an endeavour that will allow individuals to demonstrate their support for the Canadian Forces. Any amount of charitable donations are welcome and will be used to provide financial assistance to CF members and their families.

Let me also read from what Karl Walsh, president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, said: "The Ontario Provincial Police Association is extremely proud of our troops. We thank the Ontario government for listening to our request to include the yellow ribbons on our licence plates and for giving Ontarians the option to express their support."

Mr. Speaker, I can read one more. This is from the sergeant—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

BUS TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The minister will know that in just a couple of short weeks, Greyhound is slated to discontinue bus services across northwestern Ontario

between Sault Ste. Marie and the Manitoba border. Many people wonder what is going to happen.

People, especially seniors, who need to schedule trips to Thunder Bay or Winnipeg to see medical specialists or for surgeries don't know if they should or if they can, because they don't know if they're going to have bus service. Students who are away at college or university need to know, is there going to be a bus service so they can get home for Christmas and back again? Other people who are trying to make travel plans need to know, is there going to be a bus service to the airport in Winnipeg or Thunder Bay or Sault Ste. Marie? This has gone on now for many weeks.

Can the minister tell people if Greyhound is going to continue the bus service, or are people going to be left high and dry by the McGuinty government again?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, despite the comments the member made about Greyhound—they were not very glowing comments, previously—we have been working, along with Greyhound and along with others in the area, to ensure that there is a replacement service should they make a final decision to discontinue it. In fact, there are at least two other companies that are interested in pursuing the routes that are there.

The member will know that this has already happened, where Greyhound has made a decision in the past to abandon a service. Greyhound ended its bus service between Hearst and Thunder Bay. You'll recall that Caribou Coach Transportation Co. is now providing bus service between Hearst and Thunder Bay. Last summer, Greyhound ended its service between Fort Frances and Thunder Bay. Caribou Coach Transportation Co. is now providing the bus service between Fort Frances and Thunder Bay. We anticipate that this will happen once again—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is astounding. Bus service may end in two weeks, and the response of the McGuinty government is, "Well, we don't know." Hundreds of thousands of people have no other alternative in terms of transportation, and the response of the McGuinty government is, "We don't know."

Maybe the minister can tell me this: If Manitoba can create an agreement with Greyhound, why can't the McGuinty government find common ground with Greyhound to preserve bus services to communities that have no other alternative in northwestern Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I can say to the member, again, I remember he said, "I have no doubt that they're probably losing money in some places, but this is more than anything else a bargaining tactic" that they're involved in. I guess if you open the vault and decide that you're going to subsidize a company that you said was engaged in some kind of bargaining tactic—if you capitulate to them, then I suppose, in that circumstance, Manitoba may wish to do that.

At the national meeting of transportation ministers, we established a working group to deal with this on a national basis. But I can inform the member that there are companies that are interested in pursuing this particular service, and I am optimistic that those companies will decide that this is a reasonable course of action to follow and that we will see service taking place appropriately for the people in the area thanks to the representation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd like to introduce some guests who are going to be in the chamber and some who already are: Peter Coleman of the National Citizens Coalition; Kevin Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation; Fabio Iannicca of CI Investments, who's bringing a few friends; Armand Conant of the Canadian Condominium Institute; Dean McCabe of the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario; and Paul Bailey and Phil Slack, who are right over here to my left, from the Ontario public sector retirees coalition. They're here because they can't afford a $3-billion tax grab.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DIABETES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm proud to recognize, on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus, world diabetic day. In Canada, there are more than 2.46 million people who are living with some form of diabetes. In fact, Canada has the sixth-highest incidence per capita of juvenile diabetes in the world.

Last December, I introduced Bill 137, an act to permit students with diabetes in our schools to receive certain monitoring and emergency treatment. This bill was inspired by the experiences of my constituents Brooke and Jade Bordman, seven-year-old twins who suffer from type 1 diabetes.

Sadly, when my bill was presented for second reading, the McGuinty government abandoned diabetic children across this province and ordered its members to vote against it.

Shame on you, Dalton McGuinty, for being against helping our young children who suffer from juvenile diabetes.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Phil McNeely: Last Wednesday, over 2,600 people gathered at the cenotaph outside the Orleans branch of the Royal Canadian Legion to honour Canada's fallen war heroes and veterans during Remembrance Day ceremonies. The sun was shining and the weather was pleasantly warm during the ceremony, which began with a parade led by the RCMP Pipes and Drums.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work done by the Remembrance Day committee members of Branch 632, including branch president Frank Stacey; past president Bud Dion; Jim Ferguson, Woody Boudreau and Earl Patrick; parade sergeant Ray St. Louis; MC Stella Limoges; and, last but not least, Barb Shier and the rest of the members of the Women's Auxiliary, who prepared a wonderful reception afterwards.

I would also like to take this time to recognize Legion members who have passed away over the past 12 months: Gordon Armstrong, Charles Balik, Joe Banville, Bonnie Lee Bergman, Raymond Bigelow, Ray Dean, Jean-Guy Denis, Howard Drummond, Alvi Dunn, Donald Haggart, Barb Hunt, Larry Lapointe, Paul Le Courtois, Nan Morrice, Daniel Ottway, Maurice Paquette, Harry Poloz, Gerry Purchase, Paul Radelet-Beaudry and Walter Wheatley. May they rest in peace.

ADOPTION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: November is National Adoption Awareness Month, and I'd like to acknowledge the commitment that Ontario families make to adopted children in our communities.

Adoption is an integral part of ensuring a secure and stable life for Ontario children. The impact that a family can have on an adopted child is immeasurable, and adoptive families serve to strengthen our communities.

Currently, there are over 9,000 Ontario children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted. Ontario CASs have paid for over 1,500 home visits to Ontario families waiting to adopt. Clearly this is an issue that grows in importance every day.

Families, volunteers and organizations that raise awareness on this issue do so for a number of reasons: to educate Ontarians about the merits of adopting, to develop ties with those who have been impacted by adoption, and to support efforts to shape policy and legislation that will benefit the adoption community.

Adoptive families, volunteers and children's aid society workers should be commended for raising awareness on this issue and for wanting to provide children with a better quality of life.

However, with the Liberals' drastic budget cuts on Ontario CASs, it is uncertain whether the resources are available for foster children to find adoptive families. The future of thousands of foster care children is in jeopardy due to the Liberal government's unwillingness to provide adequate funding. Adoptive families and all adoption advocates need our continuous support.

RUN FOR THE CURE

Mr. Bill Mauro: In early October I had the pleasure of participating in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure. This year's organizing committee included Kathy Barr and Karen Uchman as co-run directors, Elyse Schebesch as program coordinator, Danielle Dunn as teams coordinator, Andreas Petersen as site coordinator, Peter Whittington as route coordinator, Kylee Childs as registration coordinator and Raeanne Slongo as the CIBC liaison. Additional committee members included Jody Buttman, Terry Lagimodiere, Renee Miller, Louise Nastor, Beth Wilkie, Whitney Kelly and Tiffany Schebesch.

Thunder Bay was the fourth official site to hold a run, and 2009 marked the 13th year that the run was held in Thunder Bay. The first Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation Run for the Cure had 625 participants and raised over $35,000. This year's run had approximately 1,000 runners and raised over $100,000, the final tally still not being in—all of this, of course, supported by a total volunteer base of approximately 75 members, continuing to cement Thunder Bay's reputation as an incredible community when it comes to volunteerism.

We also have a private member's bill on the order paper that would see breast screening services provided free of charge to women aged 40 to 49 years.

Next year's run will be held October 3, 2010. I encourage the community of Thunder Bay, not just the running community, to mark this date on their calendars and support this incredible, wonderful run.

ROYAL AGRICULTURAL WINTER FAIR

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On Friday, November 13, Tim Hudak, leader of the official opposition, and I were pleased to tour the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The Royal is an opportunity for farmers to show off some of the best in agriculture that we have to offer in Ontario, from the horse shows and livestock to giant vegetables and innovation in agriculture.

Tim Hudak and I appreciated the opportunity to speak to farmers from across Ontario and hear their concerns. I want to particularly recognize the soybean and grain farmers, who this year created the Soy House to demonstrate the hundreds of products which are now being produced from soybeans. It is this type of innovation and partnership with business that we need to strengthen and grow our agriculture industry in Ontario.

As they say at the Royal, this is an opportunity for the city to meet the country. It is a chance for the people of Toronto to see where their food comes from and to say thank you to the farmers we depend on.

I want to commend the organizers of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair for another great year. I especially want to thank Bill Duron and Bob Jadavji for taking the time to meet with us. I know that having the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall officially opening the fair made it a special year, but as always it is the participants who make the Royal great. On behalf of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus, I want to recognize and thank all the farmers who participated in the fair and made it a success again this year.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Last Friday, I had the pleasure of welcoming Minister Dombrowsky to Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. The minister visited both

the St-Albert cheese factory and the new Optimiste Performance Hall in Rockland. At St-Albert cheese, the minister took part in a tour highlighting the modernized equipment that is now up and running. This new equipment is the result of $1.3 million in funding through the eastern Ontario development fund. I would like to thank the minister for taking the opportunity to network with factory workers and a number of local milk producers who are part of the century-old farmers' co-operative.

The minister's second stop was at the inauguration of the new Optimiste Performance Hall in Rockland. This was an evening filled with local talent at the community's new facility for sports, recreation and cultural events. This facility was made possible in part thanks to the McGuinty government's investment of more than $460,000 to help the municipality purchase furnishings and equipment for this performance hall. This funding is part of the rural economic development program.

Thank you again to Minister Dombrowsky. Glengarry–Prescott–Russell welcomes you anytime.

1310

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Rick Johnson: Full-day kindergarten is one of the most important investments we can make to give our kids a head start and ensure Ontario's long-term competitive advantage.

Dr. Charles Pascal, the Premier's special advisor on early learning, found that one in four children start grade 1 significantly behind their peers. He also found many never entirely close that gap. But our government's full-day learning program will help turn this around.

This program will benefit up to 35,000 children across Ontario in its first year of implementation. We will start phasing it in next September and have this optional program available across the province by the 2015-16 school year.

The young students in this program will learn from Ontario's dedicated teachers and early childhood educators during the regular school day. They will improve their reading, writing and math skills and experience a smoother transition to grade 1. Schools will also offer extended day programs.

This program will put our youngest students on the path to success in school and beyond. It is one more example of the commitment our government has made to giving Ontario's students the best education possible and making Ontario even stronger.

VETERANS

M^me^ France Gélinas: On Friday, November 6, I had the pleasure to meet with Yvon Brière and his wife, Lucie; Randy Hill; Dan Draper and his wife; and other veterans. What is the bond that ties them together? They all suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, after they served our country in the military and could not get the help they needed.

They selflessly served with the armed forces in missions overseas with the United Nations or NATO. They put themselves in harm's way and witnessed very tragic events; then, they came home to Ontario traumatized. They were different people upon their return.

PTSD is an illness. Like many other mental illnesses, it is treatable and people can get better, but they will only begin the journey to recovery if they are identified and have access to treatment.

They have organized themselves into a support group called Veterans UN/NATO Canada. In Sudbury, they meet once a week, on Wednesdays from six until eight, in Little Montreal.

Last week, this Legislature did not sit so all members of this House could attend and reflect on Remembrance Day ceremonies across this province. At this time of remembrance, we need to double our efforts to ensure that all our veterans, upon their return from their missions overseas, receive the best possible treatment they deserve for putting themselves in harm's way for all of us.

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Our government recently announced new point-of-sale exemptions to the proposed harmonized sales tax. These new exemptions will help save Ontarians money on everyday items such as a cup of coffee or a newspaper. However, there are many other important benefits of our proposed HST that will help Ontarians keep more money in their pockets.

For instance, our proposed tax package will provide 93% of Ontario taxpayers with a personal income tax cut, and nearly three million low-income families will receive a new permanent sales tax credit of up to $260 for each adult and child per year. This is one of the most generous sales tax credits in Canada. What's more, the HST will remove $4.5 billion a year in embedded sales tax, and we will be providing new housing rebates of up to $24,000 for new homes.

These are just a few more examples of how the proposed HST will benefit Ontarians by ensuring that they are able to keep more of the money that they work hard for. The HST is an important initiative that will help move our province forward and keep Ontario stronger than ever before.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi

218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1315 to 1320.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Johnson, Rick	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Prue, Michael
Elliott, Christine	Marchese, Rosario	Runciman, Robert W.
Gélinas, France	Martiniuk, Gerry	Savoline, Joyce
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Paul	Sterling, Norman W.
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: During ministerial statements.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (ALTERNATE INSURANCE PLANS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (RÉGIMES D'ASSURANCE CONCURRENTS)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 219, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to provide employers with the right to participate in alternate insurance plans / Projet de loi 219, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail pour accorder aux employeurs le droit de participer à des régimes d'assurance concurrents.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to allow an employer, at any time, to participate in an insurance plan that is offered by a private sector insurer instead of the public insurance plan, as long as that insurance plan meets the regulations and the requirements of employment safety.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TAXATION

IMPOSITION

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I rise today to present the 2009 fall budget bill, the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009, which, if passed, would provide Ontario individuals, families and businesses with more than $15 billion in tax cuts over three years: $10.6 billion for Ontario individuals and families and $4.5 billion for our businesses on both Main Street and Bay Street.

The global recession has created challenges for governments all over the world. Intense global competition for investments and jobs poses an increasing challenge to Ontario's traditional sources of prosperity. We are working to lessen the impacts on our families and businesses by making significant investments in stimulus, in skills training programs, post-secondary education and early childhood learning.

But there is more to do. As important as short-term stimulus measures are, we need to position Ontario for future prosperity to help this province get on the right track for economic growth and job creation. That's why the McGuinty government set out a plan in the 2009 budget to make Ontario even more competitive and to create more jobs.

Our government is introducing this fall budget bill to implement tax cuts for people and businesses, and the harmonized sales tax. The proposed HST and tax cuts would increase business investment, create new jobs, raise incomes and reduce prices on many consumer purchases.

La TVH et les réductions d'impôt proposées augmenteraient les investissements des entreprises, créeraient des emplois, hausseraient les revenus et diminueraient les prix pour de nombreux achats faits par les consommateurs.

This is the right plan at the right time. The proposed income taxes would mean that 93% of taxpayers would pay less in personal income tax and 90,000 low-income Ontarians would no longer pay any provincial personal income tax. We are cutting the lowest tax rate from 6.05% to 5.05% on the first $37,000 of income, making this bracket the lowest income-tax bracket rate among all the provinces.

That's not all. We are almost doubling the property and sales tax credit for seniors. This means more money in the pockets of Ontarians.

We are proposing additional support to Ontarians during the first two years of transition to the HST. Starting in July 2010, eligible Ontario families would receive $1,000 and individuals would receive $300 in the form of three payments. Studies show that businesses pass on their savings from the HST to consumers. TD Bank predicts that 80% of the savings to businesses would be passed on to consumers in the first year and rise to 95% by the third year. That means lower prices for hard-working Ontario families.

A recent study by Jack Mintz, the Palmer Chair of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, shows substantial benefits to Ontarians from the HST and other tax cuts. His study finds that within 10 years, our modernized tax system would result in an estimated 591,000 net new jobs. It will raise annual incomes by up to 8.8% for Ontario families and increase capital investment in our province by $47 billion.

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The NDP may laugh at that, but we want to see more jobs in Ontario. That's what this package is all about.

In addition to benefiting from the HST, Ontario businesses would benefit from our proposed corporate income tax cuts. The income tax cuts for businesses would enhance the benefit of the proposed HST by attracting even more business investment into Ontario and creating even more jobs.

Les réductions d'impôt sur le revenu des sociétés rehausseraient les avantages de la TVH proposée en attirant encore davantage d'investissements d'entreprises en Ontario et en créant encore plus d'emplois.

1330

Beginning July 1, 2010, the general CIT rate would be cut from 14% to 12% and further reduced to 10% over three years. The CIT rate on manufacturing and processing, mining, logging, farming, and fishing would be cut from 12% to 10% next July, creating jobs in the north. The small business CIT would be cut from 5.5% to 4.5%, and the small business deduction surtax of 4.25% would be eliminated.

Today we saw the parties opposite vote against a plan that will create jobs and tax cuts for individuals, families and businesses. This plan contains a fair, balanced and progressive package of tax cuts for both people and businesses that, when combined with the HST, would put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontario families and create jobs. Now is precisely the right time to modernize our tax system so that when the effects of this global recession end, and they will, Ontario's economy is more competitive and better able to create jobs.

We have a plan to invest in our future and position our economy for prosperity and growth. Working together, Ontarians will confront the challenges and emerge stronger and more prosperous than ever before.

DIABETES

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I rise in the House to mark the occasion of Diabetes Awareness Month, sanctioned by the United Nations and recognized in cities around the world. Diabetes is a serious disease that can give rise to very serious consequences. Right now in Ontario, approximately 969,000 Ontarians live with diabetes. This number is anticipated to increase by 1.2 million by 2010. This alarming fact is precisely the reason the McGuinty government is continuing the proud history of diabetes care in Ontario which was initiated by Sir Frederick Banting at the University of Toronto with his breakthrough discovery of insulin some 90 years ago.

With two ministries working together, the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, we are delivering an integrated diabetes strategy focusing on prevention, management and treatment of this debilitating disease. The McGuinty government's strategy will help improve the health and health care of Ontarians living with diabetes and for those at high risk for developing the disease.

The province is moving forward with a number of new initiatives that will further help people manage and prevent diabetes, including:

—creating 51 new diabetes education teams across the province;

—expanding chronic kidney condition services, including additional clinic visits and increased home dialysis treatment;

—creating up to 14 regional coordination centres to help better organize and manage local diabetes programs; and

—expanding diabetes care and prevention resources, including new education kits for newly diagnosed patients; community-based prevention programs for high-risk groups; enhanced services through EatRight Ontario and a new Stand Up to Diabetes website.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include unhealthy weight, sedentary lifestyle, family history, high blood pressure and cholesterol. Research, however, informs us that a combination of healthy eating, engaging in regular, daily physical activities and maintaining a healthy weight can help to prevent type 2 diabetes. As the Minister of Health Promotion, my mandate includes promoting healthy eating and active living to prevent disease. By providing supportive environments, information and services, we can empower Ontarians to live healthier, more active, longer lives.

One of our key programs supporting our government's diabetes strategy, which I would like to draw to the attention of all Ontarians, is our EatRight Ontario service, a resource that can empower Ontarians in the fight against diabetes. EatRight Ontario provides Ontarians with access to nutrition information from registered dieticians by calling 1-877-510-5102 toll free or by visiting ontario.ca/eatright. EatRight Ontario also offers a menu planner, a new interactive online tool based upon eating well with Canada's Food Guide recommendations to help Ontarians prepare nutritious meals and achieve healthy weights.

The Ontario government is also working on a wide range of initiatives, including funding for prevention programs, specifically with Toronto, Peel and northwestern health units. These are areas with a very high incidence of diabetes. Working side by side with these health units, we continue to develop our programs to prevent diabetes and to raise awareness of the risk factors specifically for communities that need it the most. Our efforts to prevent and manage diabetes also include public education to raise awareness of the severity of diabetes and related complications, especially for at-risk populations including low-income communities and people of aboriginal, Asian, South Asian, Hispanic and African-Caribbean descent.

Improving the health of Ontarians is a priority for our government. Our diabetes strategy is part of our government's commitment to Ontarians and to continuing to work together with our partners and with all Ontarians to address diabetes in a collaborative, concrete and meaningful way.

To all Ontarians, I say to you: Stand up to diabetes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want the Minister of Finance to look at this public gallery behind me and look at the public face of taxation. Those are the people who are going to suffer from your $3-billion tax grab.

Indeed, the taxpayers in this province should be alarmed that the Liberals are attempting to ram through the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history, using a dirty and underhanded procedural trick.

On behalf of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus, I stand here in opposition to this bill. This is clearly a desperation tactic from a government that has already had to cave in and provide special exemptions on the HST. Now they are panicking, and further, trying to cut off public debate.

In the Progressive Conservative caucus, we feel that this is an abuse of power. It is the job of the official opposition, under the leadership of PC leader Tim Hudak, to protect the public interest and public trust in the face of such undemocratic moves. We're already consulting with several leading parliamentary experts on the tactics that are available to us to prevent the Liberals from succeeding in shutting us down.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They're trying to shout me out as I speak. We will use every available tool at our disposal to defend the Ontario families behind us and the Ontario families in front of us and the families to the right—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We welcome all guests. As much as you may wish to participate in the—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Stop the clock.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, I'm not stopping the clock.

As much as you may want to participate, you're not allowed to participate, and I would ask that you respect that.

Member?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On their behalf, we're calling for public consultation in every community, from Ottawa to Niagara to Windsor to Hamilton to North Bay to Thunder Bay—right across this province—because in a few short years, this Liberal government has brought us from first to worst in economic growth. They have grown our deficit by $25 billion. We are now accepting welfare payments from the federal government because of their mismanagement, and now they want to raise taxes on the backs of these hard-working people. They want to do that; they look at them as their own personal ATM machine. This is unacceptable. That means every condo owner, every soccer mom, every hockey dad—every single Ontarian, on July 1, 2010, is going to have to pay 8% more on home heating, Internet access fees, plumber and electrical fees and cellphones—and that's all before they leave their house in the morning, because when they step outside, there's 8% more on snow removal, 8% more on maintenance fees, 8% more on gas in their car.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He can continue to try and shut me down, but he will not shut this province down—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask a number of ministers to please come to order.

1340

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Now it's the portion of my speech where I get to tell them it's more than just a tax grab because once we sign this agreement, Ontario will relinquish its constitutional tax power. As part of the HST, the McGuinty government will relinquish a significant portion of our sales tax powers to the federal government. That means this Legislature will no longer have direct control over what is and what is not subject to direct taxation power, nor will we be able to change taxation in our province.

Secondly, Ontario's support of the HST means the tax can be hidden at point of purchase. This is an important point. When the HST was introduced in 1997 by their good friend Jean Chrétien, his government allowed that once 51% of Canada's population had agreed to the HST—and that means Ontario and British Columbia—tax-included pricing could be made possible by the federal government. That means once the Liberals in BC

and Ontario agree to the HST, our sales tax may not be transparent much longer.

Despite the Liberals' rhetoric—this is my third point—that the value-added taxes are the norm in 130 countries in the provincial level, that's not the case. Even though they continually use the line, "More than 130 countries are doing this," the fact is only Brazil, a developing nation, has a value-added tax at the national and subnational level.

Finally, once implemented—this is the most important point—it is impossible to repeal. And they know that. They've locked us in for five years. We're not allowed to reduce it until two years—and you know it, and you have got to be held responsible and accountable to the people of this province. Hold the public hearings and hold them across the province.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure and in some ways my pain to speak on behalf of New Democrats in the introduction of this Liberal government's harmonized sales tax bill today.

Today, November 16, we all know in the province of Ontario, evidenced by the tabling of this bill, that this McGuinty government just doesn't get it. They don't get what the needs of the people of this province are. At a time when families need help with the growing cost of living, what do they get? They get a bill that makes life much less affordable. At a time when we need to restore consumer confidence in the province of Ontario, at this point in time during the recession, what do we get? We get a bill that does the exact opposite. We get a bill that will dampen down consumer confidence because everything is going to go up by 8%. At a time when the government should be encouraging job creation, what do we get instead? We get a bill that makes it harder to find a job in the province of Ontario.

You know what? New Democrats provincially and federally oppose this 8% tax on gas, home heating, hydro, haircuts, vet bills, Internet access—the list goes on and on and on—taxi fares, domestic travel. The Minister of Finance shakes his head and he knows that the list goes on and on and on. Unfortunately, in five minutes I don't have time to name all the items that are going to be impacted by the HST.

Two hundred thousand jobs have been lost just in the last year in this province. Ontario families are looking for a plan to create jobs, a plan that's going to make our economy work for them. Instead, they get a new tax on the basics, a new tax that, according to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, will kill up to 40,000 jobs every single year. The chamber of commerce predicts 3,300 fewer jobs in construction, 9,800 fewer jobs in professional areas, 3,500 fewer accommodation and food service jobs, 4,600 fewer manufacturing jobs. This is what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce says. This is their information, their study.

The harmonized sales tax should raise a lot of money for public services like health care, but it's not going to even do that. Instead, the money is going to corporate tax giveaways. That's where the money is going to go—corporate tax giveaways. For every single dollar that the HST is going to cost consumers, $1.06 will be going out the door to business tax cuts. Meanwhile, the McGuinty Liberals are telling Ontario families to brace themselves for coming cuts because of the deficit that is currently being run by the province. "Pay more," McGuinty says, "and get less."

But not everyone loses with the McGuinty Liberals. We've all seen this. In this plan, profitable corporations get $2 billion of income tax cuts. That's $2 billion every year to companies that are doing just fine. Instead of rewarding companies for creating jobs or helping struggling companies that are forced to lay off workers and roll back wages and benefits, the government is helping to reward companies that simply don't need the help right now.

There are other winners too, and we've seen them: well-connected insiders and consultants at $1 million a day; that's the priority of this government. The priority of this government should be the people of this province, who need life to be more affordable, who need to get real jobs, who need a government that understands the role of government to help people get through a recession, not to whack them when they're down and not to hurt them when they're already hurting.

DIABETES

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is hard to believe that the Minister of Health Promotion was standing in this House and telling us that diabetes is a priority for this government. She's certainly not there to listen to our answer, and she presented Diabetes Awareness Month on a day when nobody is paying attention to diabetes because we're kind of busy with the HST right now—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member about making reference to members' attendance.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I can tell you that diabetes awareness is something that is important to the members of the New Democratic caucus, and it is something that we have tried to put forward solutions to. The decisions for healthy eating bill is something that would help the obesity epidemic and certainly help with the diabetes epidemic, but the Minister of Health Promotion hasn't seen fit to bring this bill forward to committee. There's lots that can be done—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline" for their cars, "heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for"—the petition is outdated now—"meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees"—of course they've backed off on that—"and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax ... will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families," farmers "and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I'd like to thank Ed and Eleanor Quesnelle from my hometown of Barry's Bay for doing such a great job of getting petitions signed. I sign this and send it down with Robyn.

TAXATION

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition called "Stop the Unfair Tax Grab," signed by 840 people mainly from the London area.

"Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

"Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

"Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario's economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a $2-billion income tax cut;

"Be it resolved that the undersigned call on the" Legislative Assembly of Ontario "to cancel the scheduled implementation of" the harmonized sales tax.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Saeyon.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

1350

TAXATION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition was signed by people before the Libs backtracked on a couple of things.

"Whereas the residents in Dufferin–Caledon do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services ... and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I affix my name to it and give it to our newest page.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition asking for a PET scanner for northeastern Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Simon.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I would like very much to thank the members of the Effort group for having supplied it to me, and particularly Tariq Noor and Ali Chaudhry. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. Such an ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Iman to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition signed by literally thousands of my constituents in Oxford county.

"Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition has to do with exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers. It reads as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers;

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters;

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses;

"Whereas, in Ontario," former governments "deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers;

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support" the government's bill, "the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing community in Canada, with a population that is expected to surpass 100,000 people by 2014; and

"Whereas the Milton District Hospital is designed to serve a population of 30,000; and

"Whereas young families, seniors and all residents of Milton are currently unable to access quick and reliable health care; and

"Whereas the excellent doctors and nurses at Milton District Hospital are constrained by unacceptable conditions and a lack of resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to immediately approve and initiate the process to expand Milton District Hospital and to provide adequate interim measures to prevent further suffering for the people of Milton."

I'm pleased to sign this petition as I agree with it and pass it to my page Alana.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to present this petition, addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on behalf of ErinoakKids on North Sheridan Way in Mississauga. I especially thank Ian Fernandes and Anya MacNeil for having collected these signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers. The child poverty level in Peel has grown from 14% to 20% between 2001 and 2006...; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I very much agree with this petition. I'm pleased to sign and support it and ask page Cairistiona to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on the dreaded HST, which reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car; home heating oil and electricity; haircuts; dry cleaning; personal grooming; personal fitness; home renovations; home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services; the sale of resale homes and funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of $600 to $900 per individual, and now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign this, endorse it and send it to the table with Nicolas, one of the new pages.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition has been received and sent to me by the Consumer Federation Canada and has to do with the fastest-growing crime in North America, identity theft. It's to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services and reads as follows:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America; and

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

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"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature... be brought before committee, and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

"(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

SALE OF DOMESTIC WINES AND BEERS

Mr. Toby Barrett: I've got 1,752 names on a petition from my riding alone entitled "Say Yes to Beer and Wine Sales in Convenience Stores," distributed by the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association.

"Whereas the province of Ontario restricts the sale of beer and wine to the LCBO, a few winery retail stores and the Beer Store, and the three large beer companies are owned by multinationals;

"Whereas other provinces (notably Quebec) have been selling beer and wine in local convenience stores for many years without any harm to the well-being of the public;

"Whereas it is desirable to promote the sale of beer and wine in a convenient manner consistent with a contemporary society;

"Whereas it is essential to support local convenience stores for the survival of small businesses;

"Whereas it is obvious from the current market trends that the sale of wine and beer in convenience stores is not a question of 'if,' but 'when';

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Liquor Control Act to permit the sale of beer and wine in local convenience stores to the public throughout the province and to do it now."

I sign this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, that pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the vote on second reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Thursday, November 19, 2009, during its regular meeting times for the purpose of public hearings on the bill and on Thursday, November 26, 2009, during its regular meeting times for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Tuesday, November 24, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 26, 2009, those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, November 30, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The time allocation, of course, is a drastic measure that this government seems to have taken. It's something that has been used from time to time in this House. However, on a bill of this size, which contains two complete bills within it, it is somewhat surprising that this government would bring in a time allocation bill after a mere—I think there have been six and a half hours of debate on this bill, and that seems to be rather modest for debate on a bill of this nature.

A few weeks ago, when I spoke to this bill on second reading, I said, "I suspect that we're going to see a time allocation motion on this bill sometime in the future. I hope that time allocation bill is in the distant future." It appears that I was absolutely correct in that statement, that this government would time-allocate this bill. I am extremely disappointed that the time allocation took place with such rapidity.

There are any number of quotes that could be used regarding the time allocation bills that have been introduced in this House before. Many of these comments have been made by members of the government.

Jim Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, has been very vocal about the use of time allocation motions throughout his career here. I quote from his comments on December 10, 2002: "I find it most unfortunate as well that this bill will be rammed through with what we call a time allocation motion or what is known as closing off debate. If nobody cares about this, governments will continue to do it. No matter what those governments are, they will continue to do it. It's not healthy for the democratic system. It relegates individual members of the Legislature to the status of robots, and that's most unfortunate." That was from a minister of the crown who sits on the other side of the House, Mr. Bradley, who is the member for St. Catharines. Those were his comments. And he goes on—there are about five or six different quotes that he has used, talking about time allocation motions and how they stifle debate and how they shut off that democratic process.

The Minister of Community Safety, Mr. Bartolucci, said on November 25, 2002, "I stand to speak against any type of time allocation motion because in this instance, as in other instances, it stifles debate in this House and doesn't enhance the democratic process. In fact, it does not allow the general public, the people in Ontario, to have a say in the important bills that this government should want to be taking out to committee and to have input etc." His quote was made on a bill to amend the Highway Traffic Act, which was one specific bill; it wasn't a compilation of many, many bills. It wasn't 324 pages long, as this bill is. It didn't incorporate two other bills in it.

It's most unfortunate that these time allocation motions have come before the House in the way in which they have.

I've also mentioned how the Liberals have shortchanged democracy with this bill. This time allocation motion has flushed a bit more democracy down our drain. This motion cuts off the voices of Ontarians.

This time allocation motion seems to follow a Liberal pattern: bad government in the name of good government—because this bill is called the good government bill, and the way it's going through this House, I would suggest that it's a bad bill and it's a bad way of running government. So it's bad government in the name of good government. It's a lack of accountability in the name of accountability. It's a scandal that this thing is taking place, and that scandal, of course, is covering up other scandals that this government seems to have got itself involved in during the summer of scandal in Ontario.

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The Liberals are doing this as they introduce the new accountability act. An example where the Liberals are rejecting accountability, such as the billion-dollar eHealth scandal—there's no accountability in there. The Liberals snickered and sneered as the Progressive Conservatives called for a full public inquiry that would ensure a full, independent and fair examination of the scandal, yet this bill, which is time-allocated and will pass in about 10 days, will restructure the way in which public inquiries take place. It will give the government a lot more control over how those public inquiries take place. If you read the new process that public inquiries will operate under, one would suspect that the government could scope the conclusions of an inquiry, taking away the independence of a public inquiry.

I wonder if the quality of persons who have served in the past, doing some of the wonderful public inquiries that we've had in the past in Ontario—whether the quality of persons who do those and do them because they are totally independent—whether they will want to serve on a public inquiry if in fact their hands are tied in many of the instances that they are dealing with in public inquiries. That would be a shame, because I think a public inquiry from time to time is something that is extremely necessary in Ontario in any democratic government, as are royal commissions. Royal commissions are perhaps a leg up, of a higher stature than public inquiries, and those things can be extremely valuable to democracy, can be very valuable to Ontario and can be very valuable to the way in which this province operates. To constrain any one of those processes, as this bill tends to do, I think is a great shame and a great loss of one of the truly valuable tools that democracy has in the province of Ontario.

The Auditor General acknowledged that there are questions which remained unanswered in this billion-dollar eHealth scandal. In his report, he was not able to delve into areas in which he thought that perhaps contracts were let in an unusual way. He fell short of saying that they were illegal, but he wanted to inquire further into that area and find out whether those contracts were indeed inappropriate in the way in which they were let, especially untendered contracts. What did the Liberals say when the Auditor General asked those questions? They said to Ontarians, "No, we will not undertake a full examination of how your money is spent." They said no, very clearly. This Liberal government said no to accountability.

During this scandal, we have seen two ministers, both implicated in the billion-dollar scandal, resign, two ministers who, as a result of their resignations, will not be able to address questions in this chamber; two ministers who have avoided responsibility; two ministers who have ducked the question, "How was your $1 billion wasted?" Again, the Liberals say to Ontarians, "Sorry; accountability doesn't apply to us." I sometimes wonder whether Ontarians understand how much money $1 billion is. I'm not sure that the concept of $1 billion is well understood. We can call it 1,000 million, but the concept of $1 billion—it's such a vast amount of money that I'm not sure that people understand how big a chunk of dough that really is.

The Liberals, as they sneered and snickered at our call for accountability, also voted down bringing the former eHealth CEO, Sarah Kramer, and the former board chair, Alan Hudson, before the legislative committee to be questioned. I haven't spoken to either of those people, but I would suspect that Sarah Kramer would love to come before a committee to clear her name. Her name has been dragged in the mud and she has been listed as perhaps one of the people who were responsible for some of this action. I would think that she would look forward to an opportunity to come before a committee, come before a public inquiry, and to clear her name and to re-establish the reputation that she had prior to this experience.

The former board chair, Alan Hudson, someone who volunteered their time to run as chair of the eHealth operation—again, I'm sure he would find it a good thing to come before a legislative committee to be questioned, and I'm sure he would look forward to the public inquiry and to telling us what he knew and why things happened as they did. He might also tell us how the Liberal government was involved in some of those decision-makers.

Two more key figures in Ontario were denied the opportunity to demand account of how you spent your money—two more denials for accountability by this Liberal government.

I'm not sure if the Liberals have forgotten, but the $837 million that was wasted by George Smitherman, the member for Toronto Centre, and the $240 million wasted by his follower, David Caplan, who is from Oriole, I believe, wasn't their money. It didn't belong to those two ministers. It didn't belong to the Liberal government. It belongs to the Ontario taxpayers. It's taxpayers' money, and when you're dealing with someone else's money, you should treat it with a great deal more respect than this government has shown for this huge squandering of public funds.

To put it in another frame, the Gomery report—Adscam, the advertising debacle that brought down the Liberal government in Ottawa, was in the $100-million to $200-million range, about a 10th or a fifth the size of this billion-dollar scandal which happened only in Ontario. So it was a huge undertaking to rush that much money out the door.

It isn't the first time it's happened to this government. We had the so-called Collegate scandal, where the

leftover money in one March—what was it, three, four years ago?—went flying out the door as quickly as the Liberals could write cheques on it. The Toronto Cricket Club received $1 million. They hadn't asked for anything, but they received $1 million because the money was left over at the end of a fiscal year and this government thinks that's fine to just give that money away. Well, it's not your money. It belongs to the taxpayers of Ontario and it should be treated with respect.

This eHealth scandal would be totally predictable, given the way you've handled taxpayers' money in the past. It's disgusting that you would treat other people's money with such disrespect. I'm beyond words that, at the same time as the Liberals are introducing the new accountability act, they are denying accountability to Ontarians. Now we have this time allocation motion which is going to cut off any opportunity that the two opposition parties have to bring accountability to this government, and believe me, this government needs a lot of accountability. It has conducted itself in ways which have been extremely disappointing.

In schedule 6, the Public Inquiries Act, 2009, the new act permits the Lieutenant Governor in Council to call an inquiry when it is in the "public interest." Currently, the bill provides this power for "any matter connected with or affecting the good government of Ontario or the conduct of any part of the public business thereof or of the administration of justice therein or that the Lieutenant Governor in Council declares to be a matter of public concern...." So it's making it far more difficult to meet the terms required to call a public inquiry, and I think that's a very bad thing for the province of Ontario.

It's a very important piece of legislation. It would be an important piece of legislation that the people of Ontario should have an opportunity to comment on, and yet that's not going to happen. The people of Ontario are going to have one day of hearings, probably in Toronto. The people across this province of Ontario will not have an opportunity to comment on the how they feel about what's been removed from them in this one small section of the bill. There are 79 schedules in this bill, and this is just one of those schedules.

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I am also concerned about how this new wording will be interpreted, because all the wording of this act is subject to interpretation. Because it is far more narrow than the previous act, if it were to be interpreted in a very narrow form, it would make the process of conducting a public inquiry even more difficult. There would be a much more narrow opportunity to conduct such an inquiry.

The Attorney General said that a fair interpretation will see that the new act is broader. Well, frankly, the Attorney General has a funny way of playing with words. True, it is broader, in the sense that it creates different provisions for small and large tribunals. But it is not broader when we look at the provision by which a large inquiry is ordered. Honest interpretation would acknowledge the fact that it is now more narrow.

The Liberals, by denying our call for a public inquiry into the eHealth scandal, have shown that Liberal interests can be used to determine what is in the public concern. I can only imagine how they would interpret the broader language of public interest. We will put forward an amendment to address this concern later this afternoon.

I have a few more problems with this new bill. I fail to read any requirements to make reports of the commission or the budget prepared by the minister publicly available. The bill I will be introducing, hopefully tomorrow, does ensure that accountability.

I fail to read anything in this bill about using the Internet to increase public accessibility. Surely the government would be interested in being as transparent as possible. They talked about that in 2003 before their election; they talked about running a transparent government. Of course, that was forgotten just after the October 2003 election, and there hasn't been very much accountability or transparency in this government.

One of the things that happen is that you put in a freedom-of-information request, and attached to any freedom-of-information request is the cost of the request. The cost can run anywhere from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars, depending on how much information you have requested. Surely, in a transparent government, those costs, which are restrictive to the research budgets that are allowed to the official opposition parties—if there is truly going to be transparency—the government can't restrict access to that kind of information by making it unavailable through its high cost. That appears to me to be a subject this government has used to its advantage in failing to be accountable to the people of Ontario.

I also fail to read anything about using the Internet to increase public accessibility. Liberal quotes miss the purpose of accountability in the Public Inquiries Act. On November 2, the minister said, "When a public inquiry is going to be called, what you're looking for are a series of recommendations to address specific issues that can be received in time to be of benefit to society, to the government, to the Legislature." Again, you're trying to fit public inquiries into time frames, but these things always run longer than they're planned to run, and putting further restrictions like this on the ability to run a public inquiry, I think, is a thing that makes for a weakening of the democratic process.

I also think you're going to find that it's going to affect the quality of the individuals you get to serve in a public inquiry. The more restrictions they have on them, the less interest top judges, like those we have had in the past, are going to have. They do public inquiries now because there are literally no restrictions on them. They can do what they feel is necessary in order to get to the bottom of the question on a matter, and that is probably a very, very good thing. In changing this legislation and making it more restrictive, you're going to find that people who are asked to do public inquiries will be less inclined to do so because of the restrictions that have been placed on them.

This new bill also—I failed to read any requirement to make publicly available the reports of the commission or the budget prepared by the minister. Surely all the reports—not the main inquiry, but the sub-reports that are done in order to support various points in the inquiry—should also be made public. Almost without exception, they are made public today in the process under which we currently operate, and to remove that also removes a huge amount of transparency in the way the public inquiry takes place. That's a bad thing for democracy.

I failed to read anything about using the Internet to increase public accessibility. In today's world, I think the Internet is a key part of keeping up with the business of this House. To have it excluded from this bill is another area which creates a lot of problems for me.

There is an interesting article concerning this bill in the Ottawa Citizen, November 16, written by Kent Roach. Professor Roach is a professor of law at the University of Toronto and was project director for the Ontario Law Reform Commission's 1992 report on public inquiries. This is a man who knows a bit of what he says. He talks about, "Buried in Ontario's recently introduced 322-page 'good government' bill, a proposed new act for public inquiries threatens to undermine the ability of inquiries to act independently of the government they are investigating." I think, given Professor Roach's knowledge and background, that it's a very important and somewhat damning statement.

He also suggests, "The proposed new inquiries act would compromise the independence of public inquiries." It's something that I've been talking about, but this isn't me talking; this is Professor Roach talking. "Under it, the provincial cabinet would have a statutory right to terminate the appointment of any commissioner at will or to revise the inquiry's terms of reference," even during the process, while it's taking place. Of course, that would be untenable to many people who would serve as chair or commissioner on a public inquiry.

He goes on to say, "All commissioners and those working with them would be subject to an overbroad statutory gag that would prohibit them forever from disclosing information about an inquiry that was not made public."

They did an inquiry and found damning evidence against the government, and they put the whole thing under wraps. There is a lifetime gag on all those who worked on and for a commissioner in public inquiries, and that goes totally against any transparency, accountability or anything to do with public inquiries.

It also goes on to say that, "Inquiries appointed under the new act could be little more than private studies of the existing record." There are lots of ways in which the government can do those private studies without appointing a public inquiry. It's too bad that this bill is gutting all those important processes.

"Defenders of the bill can argue that it simply builds on the fact that public inquiries have always been a creature of the executive. Nevertheless, a firm convention has developed that inquiries, once appointed, should operate independently." That is being broken by this bill. That's something that has been built on over the years and has been the tradition in the province of Ontario. Here we are seeing that tradition torn asunder to make way for a much more restricted way of conducting public inquiries.

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Professor Roach goes on to say, "There is nothing wrong with giving inquiries the tools to do their jobs in an efficient manner, but efficiency should not compromise the independence of inquiries." He questions, very seriously, that the independence of inquiries is being seriously threatened in this piece of legislation. If the government wants to conduct an inquiry on a short leash, they have other options. They can start and stop internal studies at will. There are other options that don't need public inquiries. To put a public inquiry on a short leash is a very dangerous thing for democracy in the province of Ontario.

Professor Roach talks about, "Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley has said that the proposed new act is not intended to compromise the independence of inquiries. Nevertheless, some provisions of the proposed new act do threaten the independence of inquiries." That's a sad thing.

As the time winds down on this time allocation motion that has been put forward—all members of the House from time to time have spoken against time allocation and yet it's still there; it's still part and parcel of our democratic process. But to have it used on a bill of this nature, a bill of this length, a bill of this complexity, I think is a sad day in the history of the Legislature of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: On behalf of New Democrats, I am pleased to have a few minutes to address what is happening here. So that people at home understand, the Liberal government, in an attempt to limit debate on this bill, has brought in a time allocation motion, which essentially shuts the Legislature down in terms of this bill and shuts down debate.

If this were a minor bill, if this were a bill that only dealt with a couple of specific and concrete issues, you might be able to mount a plausible argument for limiting debate. But this is a huge bill and a bill which touches many aspects of life here in Ontario. It is a bill with all kinds of complexity to it. The more opportunity that we as opposition members have had to look at this bill, the more we are concerned that this government is trying to limit debate to essentially shut the public out of knowing some very important things that would be affected by this legislation. New Democrats think that is fundamentally wrong.

The people in this province deserve to know when important pieces of legislation are being changed, when people's rights may be affected, when people's privileges may be affected or when fundamental changes are going to be made to important public institutions. All of these

things—not just some of them, but all of these things—potentially can happen should this legislation be passed. So it's just fundamentally wrong—not just for this government but for any government—to try to limit debate on a bill that is so complex, that touches so many aspects of people's lives and fundamentally will change a number of public institutions in this province. We just think it's absolutely, fundamentally wrong.

With that in mind, I want to present a motion. I move that the motion for time allocation on Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended in the following manner:

(1) Paragraphs two and three be deleted and replaced with:

"That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet during the winter recess for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and that the committee be authorized to make decisions on adjournment and time allotted for public hearings in keeping with public response to the call for oral presentations;"

(2) Paragraph four be deleted and replaced with:

"That the committee be authorized to establish a schedule for the deadline for filing amendments and dates for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill with respect to the time frame selected for public hearings on the bill;"

(3) Paragraph five be deleted; and

(4) Paragraph seven be deleted.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Hampton has moved an amendment to government notice of motion 142.

He has moved that the motion for time allocation on Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended in the following manner:

(1) Paragraphs two and three be deleted and replaced with:

"That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet during the winter recess for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and that the committee be authorized to make decisions on adjournment and time allotted for public hearings in keeping with public response to the call for oral presentations;"

(2) Paragraph four be deleted and replaced with:

"That the committee be authorized to establish a schedule for the deadline for filing amendments and dates for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill with respect to the time frame selected for public hearings on the bill;"

(3) Paragraph five be deleted; and

(4) Paragraph seven be deleted.

Mr. Hampton.

Mr. Howard Hampton: As I pointed out, the reason for this amendment is because this is a government that does not want to have public hearings on this legislation. This is a government that doesn't want the people of Ontario to know what is contained in this legislation. This is a government that doesn't want the people of Ontario to know the rights that will be overturned, the rights that will be restricted and the public institutions that will be fundamentally changed by this legislation. That is why we should be holding public hearings. People across the province whose lives may be affected by this, whose rights may be affected by this, deserve to know what the government is doing.

What I really find reprehensible is that the government would bring forward this kind of very complex legislation, very far-reaching legislation, and simply try to call it the Good Government Act. If ever there was an act of camouflage, if ever there was an attempt to hide from the public, this is it. That is what's so fundamentally wrong with this.

I am urging even members of the government caucus to have a look at this amendment and think about all of those people whose rights might be affected by this legislation, whose lives might be affected by this legislation, and the public institutions that could be fundamentally changed by this legislation, and consider that that is why we need public hearings, that is why we need to consider what is going on here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: This good government bill is about a number of different things. It is about—I think the clock needs to change; sorry. I'm happy to take my colleague's time, but in the interests of fairness—a lot of different provisions, but the overwhelming majority of them are technical or substantive amendments to legislation. These types of issues arise all the time. There just isn't a specific legislative vehicle in which to place them. That's why you put them together in something called a good government bill.

There are a few pieces in here that are more substantive, that address specific issues that have arisen as a result of consultation with different levels of government, as a result of inquiries themselves that have made recommendations, or as a result of circumstances that have evolved, and I simply wish to address a few of those.

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It's interesting to hear the comments and the fulminations and the concerns about the motion that has been brought on this piece of legislation from members of parties that regularly used closure motions. In fact, the party opposite, the official opposition, I believe brought closure motions on almost half of the pieces of legislation that they introduced. They didn't let many of them go to third reading, didn't have committee hearings, so it's interesting to hear the expressions of concern over this type of motion.

It's also interesting, in the context of this piece of legislation: We offered technical briefings to all members of the House. Technical briefings, for those who don't know, and that would be probably most of us, are briefings by ministerial staff on the specific issues in the bill, so you really get a sense of what the bill is all about.

Those technical briefings were taken up by two members, I understand, from the parties opposite, and a third member's staff. That's not a great uptake on the specifics of a bill when the concern is now about attempting to bring this to a conclusion so we can implement these provisions and get on with improving legislation in the province of Ontario.

I want to address just a few issues. With respect to the public inquiries provisions raised by my colleague from Halton, I would simply say that it's interesting to compare and contrast his comments. At one and the same time, he seems to be in defence of the existing provisions in the inquiries act, yet he speaks about the necessity of using modern tools such as the Internet. In fact, what we're proposing in the course of this legislation, in this good government bill, are means to strengthen the inquiries act so it can deal with modern circumstances. We have a fast-moving and ever-changing society, and if a government calls a public inquiry, it needs an answer that's directed to the reason for calling it. Sometimes you need an answer sooner rather than later. Sometimes you need an answer to specific questions. And sometimes you need answers that are much more broad-ranging.

Inquiries can take as much time as they take, but let's be clear about a few fundamental issues.

The independence of any inquiry called is as strong under this legislation as it has ever been. Nothing in this affects independence.

The provisions in the inquiry act—and it's important to address a few of the comments not only made by my colleague from Halton, but also made in the article by the academic Kent Roach. First, the notion that a government would have the ability to terminate an inquiry, which has been placed specifically in this legislation: It already exists. We've seen examples of that. All the legislation does is make it clear and transparent by putting it in the act rather than having it off hidden somewhere.

The notion that there would be a reporting deadline: Think about why you're calling an inquiry. It's more than an exercise; you're trying to get answers or advice on certain pressing issues. That's why you call it. Of course you need some of that advice by a certain timeline so you can address important issues. What this act does is provide for a broader range of inquiry with a broader range of tools to support each type of inquiry. It does not in any way, shape or form take away from the ability to call the time-honoured, endless-time inquiry that could take years. That can still be called if necessary. But for a society that moves a little faster than that, it also has the ability to call a very intensive inquiry. We've seen some examples of that, like the Goudge inquiry—very important inquiries that move expeditiously, that deliver answers on important issues and that use modern-day evidentiary and case-management techniques, all the while maintaining the full independence of the commissioner. Nothing strikes at that.

Indeed, much of what this bill does is to make clear and transparent powers that already exist, either in government, through orders in council, or otherwise. They already exist. It just makes it clear and transparent, and that of course is essential.

The commissioner would still have a full range of powers to elicit information in ways such as the ones suggested by my colleague. There is nothing in the proposed legislation which in any way, shape or form would take away from the ability to call the full, broad, open, timeless, infinite-number-of-witness inquiries that can be called today. But there is the ability to make sure that when you need an answer quickly, you can get an answer quickly, and when you need to scope the inquiry, you can get the inquiry scoped—and always that you do stand up and protect the public interest, including the public purse. It is important that the public purse be protected.

I just want to address a few other issues here, and those are the fair interpretation of the public inquiries provisions that we have outlined—a fair one, which would have been apparent if all had taken advantage of the technical briefings in the act.

A few others, including the Juries Act—well, we had a commission by the privacy commissioner that recommended certain changes and recommended those changes happen now, bang, and they are in here. They're in this legislation, so of course we need to get on with it.

The commissioner suggested that we report back by certain dates, to make sure that we were making progress on her recommendations, and we are. This will create an independent means of ensuring that the requirements under the Juries Act and under federal legislation are being met by people who are not on the front line of arguing a case. That's a great recommendation, a very important recommendation. We've already indicated that we're moving on her recommendations, and in this piece of legislation is clear and consistent evidence of that.

The Provincial Offences Act: Now, that's the act that supports the prosecution of offences which are not Criminal Code offences. A previous government left that to municipalities to do. There was a working group set up between the province and municipalities to see how it could work better. A number of recommendations were taken, and we put those recommendations in this legislation, quite a number of them, to make sure that it's more effective—maintaining rights, but more effective—that it moves faster, safeguards the public purse, is more transparent, and takes advantage of modern technology: video-conferencing, teleconferencing, all those other modern tools that my colleague from Halton spoke about.

You know, when you actually analyze the objections that are made to this piece of legislation, there aren't a lot, and that's because this piece of legislation, as large as it is, is overwhelmingly technical amendments, small little changes. The few substantive pieces that are in here are really ones that have bubbled up from good advice.

Why do we bring the motion? We need to get on with it. We need to get on with it to support the most effective government and the most effective legislation in the province of Ontario. I urge all members to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

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Mr. Ted Arnott: It's good to be here this afternoon after a week's break, when most of the members were in their ridings in honour of the Remembrance Day events that we all would have wanted to attend, and I attended many. But the fact is, this afternoon the government has surprised us with a time allocation motion on Bill 212. We just heard from the Attorney General, who talked about how this bill was necessary. He concluded his remarks by saying, "Let's get on with it." I would acknowledge that in my 19 years in this place, many governments have employed time allocation motions from time to time because they felt it was time to "get on with it." Certainly when we were in government for eight years, from 1995 to 2003, our party admittedly used time allocation on numerous occasions, and I think each time there was an explanation as to why time allocation was necessary. Even as the government House leader announced this time allocation motion today, I didn't hear a defence as to why it was necessary, other than because the government is getting impatient with the legislative process.

Of course, they've got a new HST bill that they introduced today to raise taxes in the province of Ontario—a massive tax hike—and they want to get on with it. But the fact is, Bill 212 was introduced on October 27. It is a huge bill, as has been pointed out—almost 300 pages—and I dare say there are very few, if any, members of the Legislature who will have likely read this bill from front to back.

Certainly, I have tried to solicit feedback from my constituents on this bill. I sent an e-mail to the municipal politicians in my riding to ask their opinion of the changes to the Municipal Elections Act and the Municipal Act, because it affects them; they're directly involved. To the best of my knowledge, I haven't received any responses yet. That's not to criticize them; they're working on countless other things. I think they need to have an opportunity to review the contents and get back to their member of provincial Parliament, being me, so that I have an opportunity to bring those concerns forward in the Legislature. There are, I'm sure, other members who have done the very same thing, trying to get feedback and trying to make sure they understand the full implications of this bill.

Again, the Attorney General said in his comments that most of these things were just housekeeping, not to worry. He said "most," not "all," which means logically that there are a significant number of changes in this bill that have serious ramifications for the people of the province, without question. It's his bill, and he would lead us to believe that all is well. But we, on our side of the House, have some very serious concerns. For my part, you won't be surprised to know that for those reasons I intend to vote against this motion this afternoon.

I'm glad to see that the Minister of Agriculture is in the House today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to her about some of the issues I have heard about in my riding—because this is an omnibus bill, Madam Speaker, I assume there is greater latitude in the discussion. Many of the farmers in my riding are extremely concerned about the issues and the general climate they are facing these days, with enhanced regulation being brought forward by this government, increased cost of production and limited government support for their sector. I've heard from pork producers and I've heard from beef producers, and there's a whole range of serious concern in the farm community. I know that the minister is aware of that, and I wanted to bring that to her attention.

The Minister of Community and Social Services is in the House today, and she should be aware of the issue involving the children's aid societies in our riding. Certainly you have an interest in this too, as we all do. The fact is, our children's aid society in the Wellington county area—Guelph, Wellington and Dufferin—is experiencing a deficit of about $2 million, which, without government assistance at year end, will necessitate massive layoffs at that agency, resulting in reduced care and support for families. That's a serious concern.

The Attorney General, who talked a few minutes ago, talked about the virtues of this bill, but he's neglecting some of the big issues under his responsibility that aren't included in this bill and that we need action on. There is a serious need for new courthouses in the province, and there is also a severe shortage of justices of the peace.

I have a whole list of local issues that I'm going to continue to bring to the attention of the government, hopefully in an appropriate, constructive way, but certainly in an increasingly insistent way if the government is unwilling to respond, whether it be the need for a new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus or the need to ensure that GO train service from Wellington–Halton Hills through to Kitchener–Waterloo is established before the end of this government's mandate in 2011. We all know we're going to be here until then, but after that, of course, the people will have their say. Also, I've talked many, many times about the need for a Highway 6 bypass around the community of Morriston in Puslinch township. We need to see a firm commitment from the provincial government and the Ministry of Transportation as to when that project will be built. The environmental assessment has been done, we're ready to go and we just need the go-ahead from the government.

I've got a whole list of other issues as well, but it's also my responsibility, on the part of my caucus, to move an amendment to the amendment that was just moved by Mr. Hampton. My amendment is: That the amendment filed by Mr. Hampton to the time allocation motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended as follows:

In the first paragraph, by deleting the phrase "and time allotted for public hearings in keeping with public response to the call for oral presentations" and replacing it with "and shall be authorized to meet on Thursday,

November 25, 2009, and on Thursday, December 3, 2009, in Toronto for the purpose of public hearings on the bill."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Arnott has moved an amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion 142: "That the amendment filed by Mr. Hampton to the time allocation motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts, be amended as follows:

"In the first paragraph, by deleting the phrase 'and time allotted for public hearings in keeping with public response to the call for oral presentations' and replacing it with 'and shall be authorized to meet on Thursday, November 25, 2009, and on Thursday, December 3, 2009, in Toronto for the purpose of public hearings on the bill.'"

The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: The amendment moved by my good friend is appropriate. I think that's what this is about. Technically, when you look at Bill 212, as has been said by almost all speakers, it's the omnibus bill from hell.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a Greyhound bus.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's actually a Greyhound bus going through the liberties of people in this precinct.

I would say that, quite honestly, the real point here is that the member from Pickering–Scarborough East should know that if he would stop sleeping in the House, we'd all be further ahead.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask the member from Durham to—

Mr. John O'Toole: He did wake up there, which was good to note. But let he who is without sin throw the first stone, shall we say.

This amendment is really quite simple. What it calls for is hearings on an omnibus bill. The Premier himself said—I believe it was in June 2003—that omnibus bills are the root of poor legislation, and I would say that I concur with his observation then and his observation now.

I would expect that members here today would look at the bill—and there are several parts, and I'm not going to go into all of them. If you looked under the finance portion, you'd see some interesting provisions under schedule 16, and I would encourage members to turn to that page. I am raising the question here because in my riding of Durham, there is a nuclear plant, and the big issue is, "What do you do with nuclear waste?" I'll read it here:

"The rules of law and statutory enactments relating to accumulations do not apply and are deemed never to have applied to a trust fund required by subsection 9(1) of the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act (Canada)."

There are several ministers present here, and I would ask them, in their rebuttal or response, to address that issue.

If you look further, there is another provision here. This is troubling, the detail in this bill, an omnibus bill dealing with waste nuclear fuel, and they can't answer this question. I put it to you that most of the members on the government side haven't even read it. If they want to refute that, they can stand in their place and do it.

I'm going to refer to the Perpetuities Act, section 11, still under schedule 16, which says as follows:

"The rules of law and statutory enactments relating to perpetuities do not apply and are deemed never to have applied to a trust fund required by subsection 9(1) of the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act (Canada)."

"In perpetuity" means forever, virtually, that these funds must be accrued in value to deal with nuclear fuel waste. Now they're deemed never to have applied. What does that mean if they deem, sometime in the future, that spent fuel is becoming a hazardous waste substance and that people's lives or livelihoods could be affected by it—which we're seeing in India right now, actually, if you're watching the issue of nuclear fuel within India. It's a huge issue.

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What's this part in the bill doing? I put it to the government, if you want my support, explain just that one small section in this omnibus bill and you will have at least redeemed some of your integrity.

My point as well is, if you look at the provisions under the Municipal Act, they're removing under the Municipal Act—some members aren't paying attention; I'm so disappointed. If I could get their attention. The member from Pickering–Scarborough East had so much to say about everything but really nothing of any substance.

My point is this: Under the Ontario Municipal Board they are denying the right of appeal. To the members opposite, they should say that they're not allowing, under schedule 21—section 9 of the act, which authorizes the use of equivalent materials under the building code, is repealed. We're talking about, in an innovative economy, you'd be looking for new materials to replace wood and other things that were perhaps less combustible. Under that section, material substitutions and building design—"is repealed"; in other words, you can't use substitute materials. I can't for one moment believe that the people here have actually either read this, or if they have read it, how come they're allowing it?

There's another thing here, in the few minutes that I have left—this is another important one. FSCO, which is the financial regulator in Ontario, the Financial Services Commission of Ontario: "Section 10 of the act grants immunity to certain persons who carry out their functions under the act in good faith." So an inspector would be granted an immunity even if they breached something, the rights of someone else under the securities provision. We know the market itself today is in breach of good behaviour itself, Bernie Madoff and others.

There is another provision dealing with income tax, as well as insurance, the Mining Act. There are so many small provisions in here that I determined right now that most of the members there haven't got the foggiest clue

of what they're voting on. If they want to refute what I'm saying, they should stand in their place and demonstrate some competency; otherwise, keep your opinions to yourself. Other than that—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise to talk about this bill today. New Democrats are outraged that this government is yet again shutting down the debate on this legislation. Why is the government, yet again, using the heavy hammer of time allocation to end debate? Time allocation only ensures that as few people as possible are allowed to speak at public hearings. Why is this government closing down debate? It is afraid Ontarians will start asking questions and get to the bottom, to the real impact of the legislation.

So, just to be clear here, we're basically dealing with truncating the time that we're going to have to debate this bill in the House. For the government to argue that somehow or other the world is going to come to an end if they don't move ahead with this time allocation on the debate is quite a stretch. To suggest that somehow or other time allocation is about efficiency or disposition of business, if we brought that argument forward to every democratic thing we do, I think we'd be in big trouble.

There are sufficient rules within our Legislature to provide members an opportunity to express themselves on legislation that they have reservations about. Time allocation is not an efficient way to deal with business. To allow that to happen is a disservice to all of us because we are all diminished by it.

Rather than making time allocation motions, this government would better serve the people of Ontario by rewriting the rules so that we can divide a piece of legislation and vote on sections of it. What I mean by that—it's the same when they stand up in the House and say, "Well, your party voted against the budget." Yes, we did, because it's not broken down into individual paragraphs or amendments; either you like it or you don't. There could be five things you like in the budget and 55 things you don't like in the budget. That's why the opposition votes against the budget. So when the Minister of Finance stands up and says, "Your party voted against that," certainly they did, because there were a million things wrong with it. So, it really fools the people of Ontario when they see those kinds of shenanigans going on in this House.

Municipal councils do this regularly, and good parts of legislation actually get enacted and those without support get sent back to be rewritten. Municipal councils go by amendments. They go clause by clause. I sat on municipal council; I know what we do. If we don't like stuff, we send it back to the individual departments to rectify it. That's what this House should do, not put a bill on the table and say, "Like it or lump it." The outcome of this is that the public can actually see what is hidden in the bills, as members ask to vote on individual sections that they agree with. It is a more transparent way to do business and allows our constituents to speak to specifics and have a real say in the laws that we pass in this House.

There are many things that I could point out in this bill that are wrong or haven't been looked at well. There are some good things.

Schedule 12, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade: another example of a potentially major and negative change in the bill that few have noticed.

Amendment to the Development Corporations Act: Traditionally, this act allowed government to set up economic development corporations to help underemployed regions—for example, the Northern Ontario Development Corp. Now it is being expanded to allow government to set up, through regulation, any kind of corporation, including those that are not development corporations: section 5(2).

The government is also being given the power to employ any persons in these corporations, whether they're part of the public service or not. This is a significant expansion of regulation-making powers of the government. It allows the government to bypass the Legislature and expands the government's growing tendency to set up new, so-called arm's-length agencies. The expansion of these agencies is not necessarily in the best interest of Ontarians.

As we have seen from repeated Auditor General reports, there is a lack of accountability in many such agencies. We have watched the debacle for the last few weeks and months in this House, where agency after agency has been brought to task for wrong spending, too many consultants, hundreds of millions of dollars. The government has decided to make 22 of those accountable—22 out of 586 that they oversee. I don't even want to think how much money has been blown in the other 558. It's pretty scary stuff. To date, I think it's about $400 million with those 22, and that's probably not all of it: such agencies as the OLG, eHealth, Cancer Care Ontario—the list goes on and on. I can't wait to get into WSIB. That's going to be a nightmare.

More is often spent on setting up agencies with expensive consultants than would be spent if work was done in-house.

As the member from Durham has said, I'm not sure that everyone has looked at these.

Schedule 8, the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act: Members of the opposition party raised concerns about a change that allows the director to reduce enforcement. We have looked into this change. The amendment appears to address the problem that sometimes arises with the continuation of enforcement after a child ceases to be entitled to child support under an agreement or order, based on his or her age or educational status. In some cases, the parent recipient of the child support does not co-operate with acknowledgment to the Family Responsibility Office that the obligation has ended, thus leaving the support payer paying sometimes well beyond the period of obligation, with sometimes very little chance of recovering the cost of his or her overpaid support. If the payer is obligated to start a

court application to end the obligation, it can be financially punitive to the paying spouse.

It would appear to address a narrow range of cases and is not an open-ended opportunity for FRO to use discretion to enforce orders and agreements. On the other hand, it is important that the section not be interpreted widely and have unscrupulous payers pretend that an obligation has ended, thus putting the onus on the recipient to show otherwise. The director should only be able to end payments under this provision if the order or agreement is relatively clear on its face that the obligation has ended.

The Municipal Elections Act: A councillor in Ottawa, Councillor Alex Cullen, has expressed concern about the requirement for photo ID for voters. He said it is of grave concern, as many seniors would be disenfranchised due to their lack of photo ID. That's another good point.

The Canadian charity law: There are a number of changes, including the repeal of the Charitable Gifts Act, which had provided that an Ontario charity may not own more than 10% of the interest in a business. Ontario was the only province to have such a restriction, and it applied to all charities. That is probably the most significant change in this area.

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Although there were workarounds with trusts etc., such a restriction, in Blumberg's view, never made much sense, and with registered charities having to comply with the "unrelated business" rules under the Income Tax Act, there is a system in place to regulate charities involved with business.

Louise Harris, of the Ontario Bar Association: The changes to the charities act come from them; also the change to the Solicitors Act—interest on the unpaid accounts.

On the Assessment Act, this question was put to the government people: "What is the purpose of deleting deadlines for municipalities to make tax policy decisions?"

Here is the answer we got from the government bureaucrats: "The current legislated deadlines do not give municipalities sufficient time to conduct their tax policy analysis and make decisions. As a result, the Minister of Finance extends these deadlines annually by regulation. Removing the legislated deadlines would provide municipalities with greater flexibility and autonomy to make decisions about their property tax policies, and would eliminate the necessity to file new regulations each year."

You might want to take a good, hard look at that answer. It doesn't quite cut it.

City of Toronto Act: "Explain the nature and purpose of the changes to sections 148 and 154 (re: regulation-making powers applying to secondary corporations)."

Answer from the bureaucrats: "The city of Toronto has made a request to allow its city services corporations to create corporations (i.e. 'subsidiaries') as a means of increasing the city's economic competitiveness, innovation, economic readiness and flexibility in meeting its needs and may facilitate project financing and joint ventures with outside parties."

Hmm, I smell more consultants here.

"The current City of Toronto Act does not allow for the province to directly regulate these 'subsidiaries' to help ensure accountability and transparency in their creation and operations."

Another one you might want to take a look at as a local council.

Question: "Please describe the nature and purpose of changes that allow [the] city to pass bylaws respecting alternative roof services that achieve similar levels of performance to green roofs. What types of 'similar surfaces' are being considered? What types of performance measures are being considered?"

Answer: "Under the City of Toronto Act, the city has authority to pass bylaws requiring and governing 'green roofs,' which are defined as roof surfaces which support vegetation"—I'm not quite sure what that means; what's going to be growing out of these roofs?—"over a substantial portion for the purpose of water conservation and energy conservation."

Interesting. I wonder how that's going to be delivered.

"Under the proposed good government bill (Bill 212), the city would be given additional authority to require and govern alternative roof surfaces that achieve similar levels of performance to green roofs. This responds to a request from the city.

"Examples of alternatives to green roofs might include 'white roofs.' White roofs reflect sunlight, thereby reducing the cooling load during the summer and reducing the urban heat island effect, both of which may promote energy conservation. Additionally, white roofs may be less expensive and more technically feasible for certain building types and easier to maintain."

How true. If all the roofs in Toronto become white roofs, I'm not sure I'd want to be a pilot flying over there. Sun reflection alone could be [*inaudible*]. Being exposed to the flight of planes, I understand a pilot's concerns about a whole city of white roofs.

"The content of the bylaw and the alternatives selected are the responsibility of the city of Toronto as a mature order of government."

I have some concerns about the Municipal Act, as it has been over the years. I know there has been nothing in this bill to discuss whether councillors can run for higher office and still maintain their positions. There is nothing in here to discuss that. That has been a bit of a problem, because they sometimes take a leave of absence to seek a higher office, but they can get their job back if they don't succeed. I'm not sure it's fair to other people who are running against them when they're assured of their position if they lose. They can take a leave of absence and go back where they were. I'm not sure it serves the people, the municipality or the province very well when they're on sabbatical.

Secondary corporations: "Similar amendments are being proposed for the Municipal Act so that all municipalities may benefit from the ability of municipal ser-

vices corporations to create secondary corporations (i.e. 'subsidiaries') and to allow provincial regulation of their creation and operations."

This is far too much control by the government over regulation of the creation and operation of large corporations.

Question: "Please clarify and describe the purpose of change to section 42."

Answer: "Among other things, section 42 of the Planning Act provides direction on the use of funds that municipalities receive as a condition of the development of land in lieu of the conveyance of land for park or other public recreational purposes. The act provides that the funds are to be spent only for 'the acquisition of land to be used for park or other public recreational purposes, including the erection or repair of buildings and acquisition of machinery for park or other public recreational purposes."

In the past, there has been some confusion about the scope of how the funds could be used. That's putting it mildly. A lot of funds that were allocated for certain projects seemed to go into other projects.

The proposed legislative change would broaden the language in the legislation to clarify the permitted use of the funds that can include improvements to park and public recreational buildings. This clarification will assist municipalities in utilizing the funds for park and recreational purposes. I'm hoping that they can enforce that. I hope that what they recommend, if the municipalities will follow the regulations—because they may need work in roads and they may need work at their water and sewage treatment plants. If this money is going to be allocated strictly for parks and recreation, is this government going to be able to keep a handle on what municipalities do with the money that they transfer to them for these projects? I'm not sure. I don't think this has been looked at very well.

Here's a very hot item: the Residential Tenancies Act.

The question was, "Please clarify and describe the purpose of changing section 74(11) regarding tenant payment options on money owing to the landlord and tenant board."

Answer: "The proposed change to section 74(11) provides a tenant with the option to pay the full amount owing to the LTB or landlord for the purposes of setting aside an eviction order. In administrating the RTA, the Landlord and Tenant Board ... has found that in some circumstances tenants are paying the amount owing directly to the landlord to set aside an eviction order. In addition, according to the LTB's guidelines, the board interprets section 74(11) as permitting the tenant to make the entire payment to the landlord. The proposed change to section 74(11) provides a tenant with a payment option and reflects tenant practices. In addition, in some circumstances it may be more convenient for the tenant to provide payment to the landlord directly compared to travelling to an LTB office."

I think there could be some problems there. I don't think they've looked at this too well either.

I could go on for hours here about the technicalities that are wrong, the oversight that has not been not applied in these cases.

Also, "The LTB requested that section 78(11)(b) of the RTA be amended to provide greater clarity with respect to amending the terms and conditions of previous applications or mediated settlements. In practice, when an order is set aside, the RTA as it is currently written serves to reinstate existing conditions—which in some cases tenants are not able to comply with. To address this situation, the LTB has been applying section 204, which permits the board to include in an order whatever conditions it considers fair in these circumstances"—whatever it feels are fair in these circumstances. I'm not sure it works both ways. I think it kind of weakens the tenant's position.

"The proposed introduction of section 78(12) clarifies that the LTB has the ability, where appropriate, to alter or amend an order with respect to a previous application or the existing mediated settlement."

Who is going to conduct these mediated settlements? Is it going to be an appointee of the municipality or an oversight appointee from the provincial government? It's not spelled out at all. "In practical terms, this is the application of section 204" again. "This proposed change provides greater clarity to tenants and landlords," in their opinion. I don't think it spells it out enough.

Now, let's get into the environment, the Environmental Protection Act.

Question: "How is section 34 being changed? It appears that the right to appeal tribunal decisions to the LGIC is being removed. Is that the case? What is the purpose of this change?"

Answer: "Yes, petitions to cabinet would be removed. This is consistent with the removal of such appeals under the Ontario Municipal Board Act and tribunals that refer to the OMB Act."

When I sat on council, we had more than our share of troubles with the OMB. Frankly, I wouldn't be upset if it disappeared. The Ontario Municipal Board has been a disaster, and they have stopped all kinds of municipalities from going ahead with projects. I would say that most people who appeal to the OMB from a private situation lose 75% of their cases.

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"As discussed in the technical briefing, the scope of appeals from decisions of such bodies has been gradually reduced over the years. Extremely few petitions are brought nowadays, and still fewer succeed." I guess I kind of spelled it out. It's like another bureaucratic level that's a waste of time. "For example, between 1993 and 2008, there was only one petition to cabinet regarding the Environmental Assessment Board (now the Environmental Review Tribunal). The bill would leave recourse from tribunal decisions with the courts"—where it should be.

The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry:

Question: "Are the responsibilities of the ministry changing, or only the name of the ministry?"

Answer: "The main change would be the name of the ministry, to add 'and Forestry' to it. However, the provisions of the new subsection 8(b) of the act (in section 3(6) of schedule 23 of the bill) are new, as are the provisions of s. 10(1)(b) of the act in s.3(7) of that schedule of the bill.

"'8. It is the function of the ministry to,

"'(b) establish and administer policies, programs and services throughout Ontario,

"'(i) supporting mineral resource development and management and the mineral and geoscience sectors, and

"'(ii) supporting forest resource development and management and the forestry industry.'"

As you know, our party had a lot of problems with the bill that came forward governing mining. Once again, we were shut down. And what the public doesn't realize is, when you go to committee level—and I'll reiterate; I do it many times in this House—when you go to committee to discuss a bill, there are five Liberals, two Conservatives and one NDP member. We lose 99% of the bills, even though our amendments are good, constructive information, and very rarely do they take our advice or use our amendments, because they're not theirs. It's absolutely unbelievable—if people knew how things worked.

I can say that in the years that I sat on municipal council in my area, I saw a lot of problems in dealing between the levels of government and a lot of stretched-out things. Yes, there are things in this bill that may expedite some of those problems that municipalities had, and I'm all for that—to alleviate some of the red tape, so to speak, and the things that happen on local councils—but I also don't want to run into it. I don't want to miss something or leave something at the bus stop. I want to do it right, and I don't understand why the Liberal government in this House continues to push these things through. If you're going to do it, do it right. And if you're going to do it right, there may be some good ideas that come from other members across the floor. Maybe you might want to consider it.

I wish that the whole governmental set-up was different. Some people wish they were all independent, so they could think for themselves and vote the way their people want them to, instead of following the direction of a Premier or the direction of a House leader or the direction of the head of the party. A lot of people would like to see that in this province, and I've heard it a thousand times. I wouldn't mind it myself, but I don't think that will happen.

All I can say is, we've got to deal with what we've got in front of us. But if you're going to deal with it, and this level of government is going down to the level of municipal government, then you've got to understand that what we decide here is going to have a positive or negative impact on our municipal governments, making it very hard for them to operate on a day-to-day basis when they're dealing with their constituents in their area and dealing with the local problems, which are numerous, as you well know if you've served on council—everything from potholes to fixing the arena to doing something at the parks, waterworks. It goes on and on and on. If we're going to be the guiding light, then I suggest we're going to have to guide it properly.

The member from Durham made a point. He said that maybe a lot of people don't read the bills, and I think he's right. But I can assure you that we've looked at this bill, and we look at all bills. We may be small, but we're very effective. We do pick out the points that could be improvements to the bill, and we point them out on a daily basis in here. Trust me, it falls of deaf ears. I think the people of Ontario are starting to realize it. I think the people of Ontario are starting to see through the maze. I think they're seeing who's doing the work, who's really concerned about their well-being. I think things are changing, times are changing, and I hope that we can make an impact in this House to make things better.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to be able to make a few remarks today. Indeed, it is good to be back in the Legislative Assembly here at Queen's Park in Toronto after a great week, a constituency week, back in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

I do want to just make one highlight that's sort of off topic, Speaker, with your indulgence: I want to congratulate St. John Ambulance in my riding of Thunder Bay, who last week launched a campaign called Operation Red Nose. As we get near the Christmas season and we all begin to be a little bit worried about that drinking and driving phenomenon that tends to persist, they are offering a volunteer service for people who find themselves in a difficult circumstance. This has operated in many other jurisdictions in the province, and I want to thank them for launching that in Thunder Bay for the first time.

Before I begin my remarks, too, I feel the need to respond to some of the comments that were made by the member from Durham. From time to time over the past six years, going on seven years, here in the assembly, I've taken the time to occasionally enjoy the comments of the member from Durham, but I must say that today he's a little bit off his game. Being such a senior member of the Legislative Assembly, to put forward the personal commentary that he did today about one of our members—I'm not sure if the traffic was bad coming in from Durham today. I don't know what got him in a bit of a foul mood, but he's a bit ill-humoured today, and I'm sure somewhere in the future he's going to have an opportunity to address those off-the-cuff remarks he made that perhaps he's wishing he had not made. Anyway, I'll leave that with him. I was just a bit surprised to hear that.

There has been a bit of discussion on the time allocation motion, most of it coming from the members of the official opposition. That part is a little bit surprising, I guess, when you consider that from 1995 until 2003 the official opposition—and I'm not sure it would be much of an overstatement, if one at all, to suggest that perhaps

they were addicted to closure motions during their eight years in power. Very, very little third reading debate on many bills came before the Legislature in that eight- or nine-year period, and often very little committee work went on in relation to different pieces of legislation that went on during those eight or nine years. So I think it's a bit surprising for all of us to hear that criticism.

In terms of the omnibus bill, I would state only this: Yes, there is room for criticism, I suppose; there is a lot in this particular piece of legislation. But again, the official opposition, speaking directly to this one, introduced what would likely be characterized as the granddaddy of them all, in Bill 26. I noticed that the member from Durham, even before I got the words out, knew what I was going to say when we talked about Bill 26. I mean, this is a bill that brought in what was anticipated to accommodate about $3 billion worth of cuts—some people said maybe as much as $6 billion or $8 billion worth of cuts—in an omnibus bill that had very little debate. I think as time went on—that bill was introduced in 1996—post that legislation, the people in the province of Ontario learned very clearly the results of what was contained in that bill and the effect that those cuts had on almost every single riding, I would suggest, in the province of Ontario, whether it was the loss of nurses or a variety of other services in the province.

There are three pieces of this legislation that I want to speak to that primarily deal with the municipal elections part. I was fortunate to have two three-year terms on council in Thunder Bay and to go through two municipal elections there. Our Attorney General spoke earlier on a piece, and our member from Willowdale here very shortly will speak on another piece. I'm only going to take about three or four more minutes to speak on these pieces that I think are worth highlighting in this good government bill, Bill 212, that deal with the municipal sector.

The first is about accessibility when it comes to municipal elections. I must say, as someone who went through two municipal elections, I am surprised that I didn't know or wasn't even completely aware of this—and I guess I'm surprised that it hasn't been done sooner; that no other provincial government has found fit to introduce amendments in this regard: Up until the point of this introduction, polling stations in municipal elections have not had to be accessible. For me personally, I can say I'm surprised to hear that. I did not know that. I don't know if other members in the assembly were aware of that. Perhaps in future they will have an opportunity to address why their governments were not interested in amending this piece of legislation. I think it is something that is important to let people in the province of Ontario know that we are doing.

1530

I can think of community advocacy groups in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I think of PUSH, Persons United for Self-Help, and Ron Ross, and the great work that they do in terms of advocacy for the disabled community, and of Al Buchan and the HAGI group, the Handicap Action Group Inc., who do a tremendous amount of advocacy for this certain segment of our population. I know that those two groups and many others will be very interested to learn that with this particular piece contained within Bill 212, if passed, beginning in 2012 we will find ourselves in a position where all polling stations will need to be accessible.

The second point that I want to touch on is this idea of a war chest, where candidates in municipal elections heretofore have been able to accumulate a significant amount of resources that they have been able to fundraise, and once that particular election has concluded, they have been able to carry that financial resource forward and use it in the next election.

Of course, the point of us changing this is that now, if that occurs, those candidates will have to either use up all of the resources that they have fundraised or, if there is any left over after the municipal election has occurred, give it to the municipality in which it was raised. They will not be able to carry it forward. This particular piece will, I think, make it fairer and easier for those who are willing to put their name forward on a municipal ballot and challenge an incumbent to begin the competition with a bit more of a level playing field going forward.

The last piece that I want to comment on under this particular part of Bill 212 is this idea that's been put forward by the minister—and I commend the minister for this particular piece—that he will strike a committee, should this legislation pass, that will review instances in municipal elections where some councillors will challenge other councillors, or members of the public will challenge individual councillors, successful or otherwise—especially those who have been successful—in terms of whether or not they have overspent their allotted amount of money in that particular election.

This one rings very near and dear to me. In my second term on municipal council in Thunder Bay, we had a situation like this that occurred, where there was a challenge from one councillor to another and then a second challenge, from the challenged councillor back to the one who put the first challenge forward. I remember very clearly the difficulties that many members of that particular council were having in dealing with this issue. They were having difficulty deciding how it was that they should vote.

For me, quite frankly, even though I don't agree with the perspective, I understand that many people did have a hard time with this. For me, it was simple: I'll put up my hand and say yes to challenging them both. I think if you are a municipal councillor or someone with their name on a ballot provincially or federally, if that happens, the only way that you can clear the slate is to say, "Yes, go ahead. Investigate." So for me, it was simple. There were only two of us out of 13, however, who voted that way, who said yes to reviewing them both. I talked to both of the people who were involved individually. I said, "This is what I'm going to do and this is why, and I would think that would be what you would want to occur," but there were many other members of council who did not necessarily feel that way.

I think the point of this, though, is the public's perception. For the public, they want to know that it's not an in-house deal being made. If a councillor votes not to investigate the expenses of another councillor, obviously to the members of the voting public this does not look that great, and so that is what this piece is aimed at changing. So a committee would be struck, should Bill 212 pass, and in the future, on a go-forward basis, should expense challenges arise, this is the situation that we would find ourselves in.

I see that my time is up. In fact, I've gone over my time—I'm getting the wink from the wings here—so I thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? Further debate? Oh, sorry. The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Way off in the far corner of the rump. Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me, although I'm way over here in the corner of the rump.

I do want to speak to this. This is a time allocation debate. When we're thinking about the time allocation debate, it's important to keep in mind the philosophy behind Bill 212, because when we keep the philosophy behind Bill 212 in mind, you will see why it is imperative that we get on with the vote on Bill 212.

What is the philosophy behind Bill 212? Well, it reflects the government's commitment to making sure that Ontario statutes are up to date and effective. If Bill 212 is passed, it's going to streamline a whole lot of processes contained in the various acts covered by Bill 212. It's going to ensure that a whole lot of the laws that are referred to in Bill 212 are clear, current and relevant. When you think of those words—getting things up to date, making things more effective, streamlining processes, bringing clarity to legislation and making the legislation relevant to today's issues—that's why it's very important that we deal with Bill 212 and move it ahead. That's why we brought this time allocation matter.

The bill proposes a number of items that are technical changes or what are sometimes characterized as housekeeping measures. What are housekeeping measures about? Housekeeping measures connote tidying things up; again, clarity, streamlining, making things better, moving the issues along. If passed, Bill 212 is going to clarify a number of outdated mechanisms and clarify some existing legislation that's very complex.

How is it going to do that? It's going to do that by modernizing terminology and replacing obsolete terms. What could be more important than bringing modernization of terminology to some of our archaic and complicated legislation here in Ontario? What could be more demanding? What could be more fulfilling than replacing a lot of obsolete legislative terms that just serve to confuse people and, indeed, to confuse legislators. That's why it's important that we get quickly to the point where we can vote on Bill 212. That's why we're having this time allocation debate.

I want to just speak briefly to a number of matters that particularly affect legislation that comes under the purview of the Ministry of the Attorney General. There are changes dealing with the Change of Name Act. The proposed amendment here is intended to overcome the problem that can occur when a protected witness and others at significant risk of harm have recently arrived from another province and require a secure name change, but can't meet the act's one-year residency requirement for a name change. That's something that is clear and simple. We should move ahead quickly on this. The amendment would, if passed, facilitate a safer and more expeditious name-change process for those who need it by alleviating the need to wait a year before obtaining a new entity.

Let me speak briefly to the Crown Witnesses Act. Here, a proposed change to the Crown Witnesses Act would make it a provincial offence to disclose a witness protection program participant's change of entity or whereabouts. There are a number of other amendments in this legislation, the things found in the Crown Administration of Estates Act and in the Municipal Elections Act.

Essentially, when you look through at all of these amendments, it brings us back to this need to "update"—that word is used—to be effective, to streamline matters, to clarify matters. That's what good government is about. That's what this legislation is about: updating things, making them more effective, streamlining things, bringing greater clarity to various processes under this legislation. That's what good governance is about. It's imperative that we deal with this bill as quickly as possible.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Seeing none, I will now put the questions.

We will deal first with the question on the amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion 142.

Mr. Arnott moved that the amendment filed by Mr. Hampton on the time allocation motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain acts and by enacting two new acts, be amended as follows:

"In the first paragraph, by deleting the phrase 'and time allotted for public hearings in keeping with public response to the call for oral presentations' and replacing it with 'and shall be authorized to meet on Thursday, November 25, 2009, and on Thursday, December 3, 2009, in Toronto for the purpose of public hearings on the bill.'"

Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment to the amendment carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I think the nays have it.

We're going to call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

I've received a notice of deferral. "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Mr. Arnott on the amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion 142 be deferred until November 17, 2009," given to me by the chief government whip. So all of the votes will be accordingly deferred.

Vote deferred.

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 204, An Act to protect animal health and to amend and repeal other acts, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly; and

That the vote on second reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill and following routine proceedings on Tuesday, December 1, 2009, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Monday, November 30, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Tuesday, December 1, 2009, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Wednesday, December 2, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to move an amendment, if I might.

I move that the motion by the government House leader, with respect to Bill 204, Animal Health Act, 2009, be amended as follows:

—by deleting the third paragraph and replacing it with, "That the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet as follows: on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, in Toronto; on Monday, December 14, 2009, in Stratford"—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member opposite might want to take care of the Toronto Cricket Club, but he doesn't want to take care of his animals.

"—on Tuesday, December 15, 2009, in Guelph; and on Wednesday, December 16, 2009, in Lindsay, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and on January 13 and January 20, 2010, during its regular meeting times, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill."

—in the fourth paragraph, by deleting "Tuesday, December 1, 2009" and replacing it with "Monday, January 11, 2010;"

—in the fifth paragraph, by deleting "December 2, 2009" and replacing it with "February 16, 2010;" and

—in the seventh paragraph, by deleting "one hour" and replacing it with "six hours."

So moved.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Chudleigh has moved the following amendment:

"That the motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 204, Animal Health Act, 2009, be amended as follows:

"—by deleting the third paragraph and replacing it with 'That the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet as follows: on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, in Toronto; on Monday, December 14, 2009, in Stratford; on Tuesday, December 15, 2009, in Guelph; and on Wednesday, December 16, 2009, in Lindsay, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and on January 13 and January 20, 2010, during its regular meeting times, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.'

"—in the fourth paragraph, by deleting 'Tuesday, December 1, 2009' and replacing it with 'Monday, January 11, 2010;'

"—in the fifth paragraph, by deleting 'December 2, 2009' and replacing it with 'February 16, 2010;' and

"—in the seventh paragraph, by deleting 'one hour' and replacing it with 'six hours.'"

The member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Of course, I'm very disappointed to have to rise today to speak to a time allocation motion on Bill 204, the Animal Health Act. I've been in this Legislature, I think, for over 14 years now, and I cannot remember a time when we had two time allocation bills brought in on the same day. In fact, I believe I probably can't remember that because the rules didn't allow it. Today, under the new rules that the Liberal government with their majority have put forward, it is allowable now to stack up time allocation bills in something that doesn't have a lot to do with transparency, doesn't have a lot to do with accountability, and in my opinion has nothing whatsoever to do with democracy.

There is any number of quotes that I could use from the Liberal benches and their opinion on how they felt about time allocation bills, the motions that were brought in. I used a number of those quotes in the comments that I had on Bill 212 about an hour and a half ago, and they would stand for this debate as well.

I'm disappointed because this motion is limiting the opportunity that farmers, agricultural organizations and members of this Legislature will have to contribute to making this legislation better. I want to tell you that Bill 204 could use a lot of help. It needs to be made a lot better.

The agricultural community was asking for a bill to help them in marketing their products, in traceability, so that we know where sick animals came from, and that's all well and good. That's how a modern agricultural industry should be operating.

This bill doesn't do that. The industry expected it to do that, and it doesn't. It is enabling legislation that may allow that to happen in the future, but how it happens, when it happens and who pays for it—especially who pays for it—won't be the subject of debate; it won't be the subject of hearings regarding this particular piece of legislation.

1550

The time allocation motion the government has introduced cuts off second reading debate, limiting committee time to four hours next week in downtown Toronto—downtown Toronto during a period of time when, I bring it to the government's attention, there are a lot of farmers out there who are harvesting crops right now. The weather is good. Corn is coming off. You don't always have this kind of weather during harvest time. The crops are coming off, and they are going to continue to come off.

Farmers don't have time to take a day off and come to downtown Toronto. They may go in to a rural centre some place and make comments at another period of time of the year. They may even write submissions on the bill, but right now, during harvest time, this bill has been timed—perhaps on purpose—to ensure that the comment is extremely limited.

It has limited debate in committee on clause-by-clause and has reduced third reading debate to one hour or 20 minutes per party—one hour for third reading. It's unbelievable that a bill that is somewhat complex could be limited to one hour for third reading. This is a government that talked about accountability and transparency. Where is the transparency in a one-hour third reading debate?

We all agree with the principle of the bill: to improve animal health and food safety, but the way the Animal Health Act is written causes us great concern, not just for the PC caucus but for agriculture stakeholders throughout this great province of Ontario. We need to ensure that the agriculture industry gets the opportunity to raise these concerns so they can be addressed before the legislation is put in place.

One of the things that agriculture groups were looking for in this bill, as I said, was a traceability system, and Ontario is a forerunner in the traceability systems. The dairy herd improvement act traced every dairy cow in this province from 1947, I believe it was, until today in most cases. Today it's voluntary but that traceability continues to happen, and we've been tracing dairy cows over that period of time. So Ontario has a history in that area, and it could be put together with little problem.

However, the government has chosen not to do that in this bill. They have chosen to make this bill one of enabling legislation so that the system that does come into place—and who pays for it—will not be the subject of public debate but rather the subject of regulation.

Unfortunately, the only thing this bill does is give the Minister of Agriculture the ability to set up the traceability system at some point in the future, by regulation, meaning that it could all happen behind closed doors where there is no requirement to consult with the public.

I'm sure that the minister will assure everyone that she is committed to getting public input by giving the time allocation being debated today. I'm sure we can understand why some stakeholders would question her word on that subject.

We have heard a number of other concerns from stakeholders about this legislation. No warrants will be required for searches of agricultural property—searches that may be as minor as to see whether or not proper licences are in place. Surely to check a licence isn't so urgent that it needs unwarranted entry. This government seems to be running roughshod over those tenets of democracy. To get a search warrant is a fairly easy thing to do. Police officers and inspectors have available to them, 24/7, the ability to get an electronic search warrant. To give this huge power that a person can walk on to your property and into your barns and office to examine things is going way over the top.

This bill also seems to be very heavy on red tape, with new requirements for licences and fees. The cost for every one of those licences and fees comes out of the pockets of the farmers who are hard-pressed under today's agricultural environment. There's nothing in the bill that says who is going to pay for that, but I guess we all know that the farmer is going to pay. If the farmer has to pay all these extra fees, those fees come off the bottom line; they come out of his pocket. It's adding insult to injury when you require people who are in desperate

straits to continue to pay more and more and more. It also says the minister "may" provide compensation, leaving it up to her discretion.

We need to strengthen the section on the chief veterinarian to make it equivalent to the chief medical officer of health. It states in the bill that the chief veterinarian has to be a civil servant, a public servant. That's not the case for the medical officer of health. I think they become a public servant when they take the office, but they don't have to be at the start. I think that's a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

We could have worked together to address these concerns and ensure that the final legislation worked out best for farmers. The farmers would be more than happy to work in the best interests of their organizations and of their industry and to make this a better piece of legislation. However, that opportunity has been denied to them—denied to them, again, by the actions that the government has taken on this double-hit day of two time allocation motions. They sure won't get an opportunity for input into this bill in this—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Not so. Absolutely—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oh, they're going to get a whole four hours of hearings in downtown Toronto during harvest time. The minister, of course, doesn't understand what it's like to drive a combine for 18 hours a day. Instead, the McGuinty government is cutting off second reading debate, limiting committee hearings and only allowing each party 20 minutes to speak to the third reading of this bill.

When Better Farming magazine called to ask the Minister of Agriculture why this bill was being rushed through, she said that "this bill is receiving the same due process that I believe the majority of bills that have been passed by this government have received." Given that this is the second time allocation motion we're debating today, perhaps that is accurate, but it certainly isn't something I'd be proud of if I were a minister or a member of this government. This motion—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Six hours of debate so far.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Six hours of debate.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Six and a half.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: If the minister thinks that six and a half hours of debate on a confused bill, on a comprehensive bill like this, is an adequate way to address the future of farmers in this province, the minister is sadly lacking in her perspective on what the agricultural industry of this province needs and deserves.

This bill needs a lot of work. It's not going to get it with a time allocation motion. This government, who talked about transparency, who talked about openness—

Mr. Robert Bailey: Hollow promises.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —has shown us today that this promise is absolutely hollow, like all the other promises have been hollow: about tax reductions, about no increases in taxes, about almost everything this government touches. They have lacked the sincerity to follow through on their promises, to the point where today in Ontario, when a promise is made, people have the opportunity to ask, "Well, is that a real promise or is it a Liberal promise?"

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I have a few comments on this bill. Once again, I'm extremely frustrated by time allocation basically cutting off debate. As the member spoke, six hours is hardly enough for the farmers of this province to get their points and concerns across, and having it one day in Toronto isn't really conducive to having a broad spectrum of people in the farm industry able to get their points across. I think it's once again, "Push it through, get it done, and worry about things after. Don't do it right the first time."

I have updated information from November 12. The National Farmers Union issued the following release:

"Ontario Animal Health Act Raises Questions

"'Could the provincial government's Animal Health Act shut down organic livestock production in Ontario? Given the experience of certified organic turkey production, that is a real worry,' says National Farmers Union (NFU) Ontario coordinator Grant Robertson." Here we go again, Madam Speaker; this is his quote: "'Getting this legislation right should be the priority for this government, not rushing it through,'" like all the other bills they've done in the last two years.

"Robertson was reacting to the news that the Ontario government has begun to limit debate on the Animal Health Act in the Legislature. But even more troubling is that only one half day has been allocated for consultation, and that is set for November 25 in the heart of downtown Toronto—far away from Ontario's farm communities."

1600

Somehow, I can't see any tractors rolling down University Avenue to deal with this situation. I really don't believe that farmers are going to take them seriously. Farmers are not going to take the time to come to Toronto to say what they know—and they're the ones who know it better than anyone. This minister can do her road show and visit everybody, but then put ahead her ideas and not listen to anyone else. That's quite possible too.

"The NFU, like Ontario's farmers, supports the principles this bill is based upon. For farmers in Ontario, human and animal health is top priority" to all people. "'This is particularly true for the NFU as many of our members sell directly to eaters in local markets,' stated Robertson.

"'Under spurious animal health conditions, the Turkey Farmers of Ontario effectively eliminated certified organic turkey production in Ontario for farmers with more than 50 birds through their regulatory powers,' said Robertson. 'Farmers worry that we could see similar things happening with a variety of livestock, where providing natural, healthy outside access is a major part of the raising of that livestock.'

"The NFU is also concerned about other provisions of the act including:

"(1) Compensation for farmers is discretionary, meaning that farmers could potentially have their livelihoods devastated if animals are ordered to be destroyed—a common precautionary action. This could create a situation where well-meaning farmers might be afraid to come forward with disease concerns" because of economic devastation.

"(2) The cost implications of the licensing and fees the act will create for farmers, especially for small and beginning farms. Because of the way food is sold and marketed, there is simply no mechanism for farmers to recoup these costs from the marketplace as there would be in other" types of businesses.

"(3) A new regulatory regime may need to be created for farmers that currently fall outside the supply-managed inspection criteria. As an example: Someone raising 300 chickens in Ontario for local consumption does not have to comply with all the regulatory burden a large chicken operator now must. Will a new layer of red tape be created between Ontario's eaters and Ontario's farmers?

"'There is simply no good case for rushing through this act and risk getting things wrong,' said Robertson. 'Limiting consultation to a few short hours in Toronto on an act that could have profound'"—I repeat, profound—"'implications for a large number of Ontario's farmers just makes no sense if your goal, as it should be, is to make sure this act does not create more animal and human health problems than it is intended to address, along with even greater financial burdens for Ontario's farmers.'"

Additional notes:

The NFU is particularly concerned about those farmers—mostly small family farms serving local markets—who raise their livestock with outside access finding themselves targeted.

Animal health was the justification the turkey farmers used.

Without the NFU card campaign, which got the notice of a Toronto Star reporter, turkey farmers regulation effectively banning organic turkey production would have just sailed through.

Even now, it is hard to tell if it is going to get fixed.

It is not hard to imagine the powerful forces in food production that are dependent on the industrialized model using that power to eliminate "hazards" to that model.

If we really want to do something about BSE, for example, we could just test all animals, get rid of all this 30-month stuff that keeps causing problems and regain lots of closed markets—but we don't do that. That would be better from both a cost situation and food safety, but the powers that be don't want that.

NFU is also concerned about the language around discretionary compensation. That has the potential to create haves and have-nots in the awful thought of having an outbreak of something in Ontario.

The government needs to either fully fund this stuff or quit pretending they're trying to do anything.

Additional media coverage:

"New Ontario Animal Health Act Looms

"Better Farming, November 11, 2009

"Ontario's proposed Animal Health Act could be approved by early December, if the provincial Legislature approves a motion to move from second reading debate to public hearings.

"But Ontario's Progressive Conservatives say the timeline in the Monday motion is too fast.

"If passed, the motion would reduce industry stakeholders' opportunity to deliver feedback to four hours during a Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly session, scheduled November 25. It would also return the proposed act to the Legislature December 2 for its final reading, warns Tory agriculture critic Ernie Hardeman in a news release.

"'Four hours of committee hearings on one afternoon in Toronto is an insult to the thousands of farmers who are going to pay the cost of this bill,' the release quotes Hardeman.

"Provincial agriculture minister Leona Dombrowsky says the proposed act, Bill 204, 'is receiving the same due process that I believe the majority of bills that have been passed by this government has received'"—I guess that's good, six hours—"and after 6.5 hours of debate in the provincial Legislature, 'It's time to get some public input.'"

A whole six hours, and the public has to come to downtown Toronto to get their points across. Good luck.

"Dombrowsky says although the time for presentations is fixed, the public can submit comments in writing." That'll go a long way. That'll fall on some bureaucrat's desk and into the garbage can. "The committee will consider these while reviewing the bill." I can't wait. That'll be exciting.

"Hardeman 'should know that,' she says."

Mr. Hardeman should know that you can put in written submissions.

"Hardeman could not be immediately reached for comment.

"His release states the Tories support the bill's principle—to protect animal health and food safety—but he has concerns. These are:

"Compensation for orders under the act, such as destroying animals, is discretionary;

"It permits inspectors to enter and search properties without a warrant; and

"It creates red tape and expenses for farmers through licences and fees."

Not only is that going to create problems between the local enforcement agencies, the ministry, the police, and the farmers—people coming on their property they may not have been alerted about or don't know. We could have some problems there. It could even result in violence. Have they taken that into consideration? I don't think so.

"Dombrowsky says the bill is consistent with what the province's agricultural industry has said it wants and the Liberal government sees it as 'a very important piece of legislation.'"

Every piece of legislation that leaves this building should be important, but it also should be discussed properly. Every point of view from every type of farming in this province should be involved in the discussions, not a select few, not picking certain people who may support the party to talk about bills. You want to get it from every aspect of our society, every corner of this province. Every farming industry in the province should be involved.

"She notes that similar legislation is in effect in other provinces. A power such as warrantless entry is not commonly used but 'is a provision that's there when the (province's) chief veterinarian would be of the position that to not to enter would compromise the safety and security of the food system.'"

We agree that if he was not allowed in there to inspect it could cause a problem. But if there is a problem and it's the person's whole livelihood, are they going to come forward and just volunteer the destruction of their flock or of their beef cattle without a bit of a fight or "Maybe it'll go away. Maybe I'll wait a week." Sure, the veterinarian should be allowed in there. But could he be mistaken about something? Can veterinarians make mistakes? Sure. Can doctors make mistakes? Sure. They may misdiagnose something. We don't know. The guy could lose his whole herd.

"Have concerns about H1N1 motivated the legislation?

"Diseases such as H1N1, avian influenza and BSE were considered in the development of animal health legislation, Dombrowsky says. But the bill is 'a reaction to the industry saying we need to have measures in place' to enable the province's chief veterinarian to take action to protect food safety standards and 'animal health on farms.'"

We're not going to argue that. That's true. There should be a mechanism in place that allows veterinarians to do their job and to protect the health of the people of Ontario. I'm not quite sure what they've put in the bill is going to cover all of that.

"Tackling the specifics of handling H1N1 outbreaks is the kind of detail that is left to regulations and these haven't been written yet, she adds."

These haven't been written yet. Well, why would you put a bill forward when these details that are left to regulations haven't been written yet? I personally wouldn't do that. I would do it right, put all the regulations in place, put the concerns up front, deal with it all, before I rush a bill through just to satisfy somebody; I don't know who. As an Ontarian and a consumer of food and drink, I certainly want to be protected. I don't want anything rushed through when it comes to my family's health or food or drinking situations. I don't want people just to do a bill halfway; I want it done properly, completely, no ins and outs—especially when it comes to food and beverage.

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I'm not an expert in agriculture, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that there are things that are missing in this bill, and if you don't allow people to discuss it, if you don't allow people who are knowledgeable to come to the forefront and talk for three, four days—you might get more people. Some people are tied up. They can't come that particular day. You're not offering them any alternatives. You come to Toronto for four hours and say your piece, and away we go. That doesn't cut it, and I think they're going to have some real problems if they continue in this pattern.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm happy to have the opportunity to respond to some of the comments that have been made so far on Bill 204, which is the Animal Health Act. There have been comments made by members on the other side of the House about the intent, about marketing food products—the wonderful Ontario food products, and that is, I think, a consequence of having good animal health legislation in place in any jurisdiction—and so on.

I think that it's important to focus on the purpose of the Animal Health Act, and that is to protect the health and well-being of the animal, of the herds in Ontario; to ensure that we have measures in place when there may be an event so that the appropriate civil servants—in this case the Chief Veterinarian of Ontario, who is specifically trained in animal health issues—will have the ability to go on a farm to assess a particular animal health situation and make the appropriate decisions in terms of how the operation perhaps should be. Maybe it's quarantine; maybe there is a surveillance order that needs to be placed on the facility or on the farm. We don't have that in place in Ontario. They do in other provinces in Canada, and so our producers have told us why it is important that we move forward and ensure that we bring good-quality animal health legislation to this assembly; that we debate; that we engage them as well and then move forward as quickly as possible. Because with respect to marketing, when we are able to say that we have the safest and best-quality food anywhere, we know that helps with marketing the food product, but it relates directly to the health and well-being of the animals and the farm operation that they're raised on.

So that is what this bill is all about. It's about putting in place systems that will ensure the prevention of animal disease, that will enable or facilitate the detection of animal disease and that will also control animal diseases and other hazards on farm. That is what this legislation is all about.

We have, over the course of very many months, heard from a number of stakeholders who have pressed the point with us: why it is important to move forward with this legislation. They have identified those jurisdictions where there is good legislation already in place. They have shared with us how they believe that in Ontario, we can even improve upon what is in place in other jurisdictions. We have listened very carefully to what they have told us, and I think the document that you see before you is a document that we've been able to bring to

this assembly because we've listened very carefully to our stakeholders and what they told us they needed to see in this legislation.

I wanted to talk about the traceability portion of this legislation and that it is, in fact, enabling legislation. This province has been very clear with our stakeholders and we've been very clear at the federal-provincial-territorial table that we fully support, in the province of Ontario, a national traceability system. We believe that producers across Canada would benefit tremendously from a national system, and we think, of course, that a national system should be supported at the national level too. We do also recognize that in order to facilitate the implementation of a national system, we need to have enabling legislation in place in the province of Ontario to move that forward. That is what is contained in Bill 204, where the minister would be able to enact a traceability system, and, I would say, presumably in this case, in partnership with the federal government.

We've heard from producers across Ontario who recognize that a national traceability system is absolutely the way to go when setting up the system, because those products that are marketed beyond our borders are marketed as Canadian food products, not necessarily as Ontario food products. People in Ontario have a great affinity with and attraction to Ontario food products. But beyond our borders, it's the Canadian maple leaf that makes our food products most appealing, and that is why we are looking for a national traceability system.

It's very important as well to clarify statements that have been made about Bill 204 adding to the red tape of farmers and producers across our province with more licences and more fees. That is an issue that we want to take just a little bit of time to correct, because that would not be the case. If you go to the second-to-last page of the bill, you will see that this bill does repeal certain acts: the Bees Act, the Livestock Community Sales Act and the Livestock Medicines Act. Those bills are repealed. But what it means is that, for the most part, the provisions in those acts are now contained in this Animal Health Act, because the provisions in those acts are consistent with animal health.

The authority to issue licences is a necessary part of this bill because it will allow for the future consolidation of the substantive content of the bills that I mention: the Livestock Medicines Act, the Livestock Community Sales Act and the Bees Act.

With respect to farmers who are in the business and for whom the acts that I have identified, that I have mentioned here—it doesn't touch their business. They are not required to have licences now, at the present time. Going forward, there is no additional burden on them. They will not be required to have licences. It will be only those individuals and businesses that are now required, under the three acts that are mentioned, to obtain licences—they will still be required to obtain licences, and that is what is described in our act.

The third point I want to make is with respect to compensation. There have been comments made on the other side of the assembly that there's some question about the compensation: Is it adequate? What I would say is that the compensation provisions, as they have been outlined in Bill 204, are absolutely consistent with the way compensation is delivered to producers in an animal health event in other provinces. Again, we have paid very close attention to what our stakeholders have told us. They have identified those models that they think are reasonable and workable and fair. We certainly want to be fair about this. Those are the provisions that are contained in this act.

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We do look forward to hearing from our stakeholders and from members of the opposition about the compensation piece, to understand where it can be strengthened and, I think, where it can be strengthened in light of what is in place in other jurisdictions as well. As I indicated, there are many other jurisdictions in Canada where we can go to look at what has been put in place.

I also want to speak to some of the comments that have been made about the committee times we have set aside for those who are interested in improving this bill to have an opportunity to make those points. We have located the committee hearings here in the city of Toronto. We have located them here at a time immediately following, in one case, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture annual meeting—they're having their meeting two days prior to the day we have set aside for a committee hearing. So I'm certainly hopeful that some of those folks who have come into the city to attend the annual meeting will also be able—I expect that some of them will be making application to be heard at the committee.

We also know that there is, of course, the tradition in this place that people can submit in writing to committees their positions, their points, their issues on any piece of legislation. I think it would be wrong to present that personal presentations to committees are the only way that the public can participate in having their issues and their voices heard. We will be very eager to consider all the submissions that will be made to committee, both in person and in writing. There will always be that. That is consistent with the way other bills have been managed and have made their way through the process, and that is what I certainly expect, should this motion be passed today.

It's important to remember that we think it's time to go to the people and hear what they have to say. We've had fully six and a half hours of debate on this legislation in this assembly. We'd now like to hear what some of the stakeholders have to say. We have heard some comments from the National Farmers Union, but there are other farm organizations in the province of Ontario that have been largely supportive, and I know they will be making points that will enable us to improve the legislation that we have here.

I very much look forward to the next few weeks ahead of us as we work very hard—all of us in this assembly—rolling up our sleeves to get the Animal Health Act in the

condition that will enable us to pass it as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise to speak to Bill 204 today. Agriculture is a very important segment of the Sarnia–Lambton community. It's somewhere around the second-largest income producing business in Lambton, so this bill will be very important to the farmers in my riding and in many other ridings in Ontario.

A number of criticisms we have, on this side of the House, are that we feel the bill goes far beyond what is required to protect animal and human health, and creates a system of permits and licences that are more red tape and cost to our farmers, but there is no compensation for the time, paperwork and expense.

Stakeholders have asked continually for a traceability system, which is largely absent from this legislation. I understand that there is a small section that allows the minister to set up a traceability framework by regulation, meaning that it all gets done later and behind closed doors.

While we all agree with food safety, this bill goes too far in removing the rights of individuals, in many cases without any foreseeable benefit either to animal or human health. For instance, it will give inspectors the right to enter premises without a warrant to see if proper licences and permits are in place. This is not a circumstance in which there is enough urgency to justify entry without proper process. We, on this side of the House, feel that the bill could be amended to remove the section that would allow these new permits and licences. In addition, the bill should be amended such that the consent of the owner or a warrant is required to enter private property in all but the most urgent circumstances. We also feel there should be an amendment to strengthen the section on compensation and remove the discretion unless there were extenuating circumstances such as fraud or negligence.

Agricultural organizations are still speaking in favour of a traceability system. Many of them thought there would be more emphasis on that in this bill; there isn't, and they're disappointed.

The communiqué issued at the end of this summer's federal-provincial-territorial meeting committed all agricultural ministers to setting up a system such as this by 2011 at the latest. These farmers believe that government needs more tools in order to deal with disease outbreaks and ensure animal health. They also believe that having animal health legislation and a traceability system in place would allow them to demonstrate these high levels of food safety, and that's why they passed that type of legislation.

A number of the ministers spoke about how a number of agricultural organizations are in favour of this, and we have letters they sent to us. Here's one from Ontario Pork, representing 2,800 farmers who market hogs in the province, including hog marketing, research etc. This adds some 33,000 jobs in Ontario. The total industry output from farm gate sales is estimated at $4.7 billion into the Ontario economy. Ontario Pork says, in this letter to the minister and to us, that it "sees a need for further clarification within the act regarding mandatory reporting...." The proposed legislation—and I'm just reading some parts of it—"must work toward reducing the regulatory burden on the livestock industry and its ancillary industries. The legislation should include provisions to revoke and replace other legislation...." Legislation in "areas that are not directly related to animal health will be excluded from this legislation."

"One example of this is animal nutrients, which are already regulated under two existing pieces of legislation. Duplication must be avoided in all areas, including the administrative level, in order to keep requirements for documentation from becoming yet another burden on producers."

Ontario Pork says, "We request the development of a regulation relating to fair compensation or indemnification policies for direct and specified indirect losses for any producers whose animals have been ordered destroyed by government, or whose income has suffered as a result of a disease outbreak. This could include but not be limited to losses from quarantine, extra feeding costs, lost market value due to weight or age discounts...."

Ontario Pork also insists that industry stakeholders should be "afforded the opportunity to review the exact wording of the legislation and resulting regulations prior to them being enacted in order to confirm interpretation and ensure clarity that will reduce the risk of wording changes significantly altering meaning and intent."

In closing, the letter says, "Ontario Pork would also like to be clear that only through in-depth consultation can industry acceptance of this legislation be achieved. Rushing legislation to achieve short-term goals or objectives is not always in the best interest of Ontarians or the affected industries." That's signed by Mr. Keith Robbins, the director of communication and consumer marketing for Ontario Pork.

The Ontario Cattlemen's Association wrote a letter July 20, 2009: "The Ontario Cattlemen's Association ... is a grassroots organization that represents the 19,000 beef producers in the province of Ontario. OCA advocates on behalf of its members in the areas of government lobbying" etc. Some of the things that they would like to see are traceability: "We insist that the system be designed in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The scope of traceability for beef cattle should be developed to ensure that:

" i. It does not impede or delay commerce.

"ii. Costs of the system must not result in the industry becoming non-competitive.

"iii. The technology must be capable of reading identification at a rate which accommodates normal commerce.

"iv. Tolerance ranges for readability must be acceptable to the industry standards.

"v. Producer information must remain confidential."

"Mandatory reporting": "The list of reportable diseases for the province must be compiled only after open consultation and agreement by industry stakeholders. Additionally, if there is a mandatory reporting of risks other than animal diseases, we insist that industry is extensively consulted on the specifics, including indemnification and implementation protocols."

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Under "Disease prevention, control and monitoring," they go on further to say, "We request that any biosecurity standards are determined by the commodity groups in conjunction with government and other industry stakeholders. The standards should be science-based and consider the economic impact on the industry, and must not result in the industry becoming non-competitive when compared with other jurisdictions."

They go on with a number of other things, but at the end: "We expect and support the development of both emergency humane slaughter and/or disposal policies for livestock," and that the development of a comprehensive carcass disposal plan be part of this legislation as well.

In closing, they say, "We request the development of a regulation relating to fair compensation or indemnification policies" that are implemented by this bill. That's signed, along with a lot of other comments, by Gord Hardy, who's the president of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association.

The Ontario Farm Animal Council also wrote to the minister and to us. They said, "We are also of the opinion, however, that the proposed legislation oversteps its mandate. The intent to regulate the handling and housing of livestock as described under the animal health promotion proposal must be restricted under the act to emergency measures and situations involving the containment and remediation of animal disease outbreaks and contamination. The proposed legislation should not include general animal husbandry and care within its scope.

"Wide, sweeping handling and housing regulations, as currently proposed, would be problematic from various perspectives that have previously been outlined by OFAC and other industry groups....

"Producers should not have to report hazards that do not jeopardize the health of animals outside the herd/flock or of humans. All listed hazards plus reporting requirements would need to be consistent with other jurisdictions.

"We also wish to highlight the need for a fair and adequate compensation system as well as an appeals process under this proposal."

Animal care regulations are one of the things they've made recommendations for:

" ... housing standards on farms should be limited to extenuating circumstances and clearly stated within the act. Specifically, such standards should be restricted to emergency measures and situations involving the containment and remediation of animal disease outbreaks and contamination....

"Where animals assemble: Animal handling and facility standards where farm animals assemble, such as sales barns or assembly yards, are somewhat covered already by the Livestock Community Sales Act.... Any standards must be science-based and correspond to already existing protocols."

Under "Mandatory reporting" it says that "the list of reportable hazards for the province must be compiled with care and only after consultation and agreement by industry stakeholders."

They go on to talk about compensation being adequate and being something that's well determined.

"Appeals: An appeals process for decisions related to compensation or licences prescribed in the regulations, similar to those provided under the Alberta Animal Health Act, should also be written into the proposed act."

That's signed by a Mr. John Maaskant, who is the chairman of the OFAC.

We talked earlier about this time allocation bill and the government ramming this through. I'd like to quote a number of members who were in a different position back in 2002.

Jim Bradley, regarding a certain bill at that time, Bill 216; this is December 2002: "I find it most unfortunate as well that this bill will be rammed through with what we call a time allocation motion or what is known as closing off debate. If nobody cares about this, governments will continue to do it. No matter what those governments are, they will continue to do it. It's not healthy for the democratic system. It relegates individual members of the Legislature to the status of robots, and that's most unfortunate."

The same member, Mr. Bradley, on November 5, 2002, referring to An Act to provide for declarations of death in certain circumstances, said, "First of all, I must say that in principle I vote against time allocation motions. I think everyone in opposition should do so. I think there are some in government"—they should listen to this. "I think there are some in government who should, if not vote against the time allocation motion, absent themselves from time to time because they recognize this is the crushing of debate on yet another subject before the House." The wise Mr. Bradley, again in 2002.

Here's Mr. Bartolucci in November 2002—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Amazing, eh?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. I don't know if he voted against it. I'm not sure.

It was November 2002 and it was a bill about the Highway Traffic Act. This is Mr. Bartolucci: "I stand to speak against any type of time allocation motion because in this instance, as in other instances, it stifles debate in this House and doesn't enhance the democratic process. In fact," Mr. Bartolucci said, "it does not allow the general public, the people in Ontario, to have a say in the important bills that this government should want to be taking ... to committee," that we might have input on.

Another famous member from that side of the House in November 2002, the Honourable Dwight Duncan, was speaking to Bill 198 about budget measures—imagine—and other initiatives. He said at that time, "Stop using

time allocation the way you've used it to force closure of debate to stop the democratic process in its tracks." He said, "Let's try to work together to make this institution function the way it's intended to." Very wise suggestions. I don't know whether they meant it or if something has changed.

There is also a letter here, written by Mr. Rick Johnson. It was an open letter. No, this was written to Mr. Johnson; this was from Mr. Ernie Hardeman. This was to a newspaper: "I understand from your recent column in Kawartha Lakes This Week that your first major assignment as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture is to 'shepherd Bill 204, the Animal Health Act ... through the Legislature.'" Mr. Hardeman said, "I appreciated your repeated commitments to committee hearings on this bill. On October 19, I was pleased to hear you say in the Legislature, 'Our government has a very good record regarding bills going to committee, and I'm sure that this bill will go to committee to gather the input from stakeholders.'

"That is why"—this is Mr. Hardeman speaking—"I was so disappointed that your government has filed a time allocation motion that will severely limit the debate and consultation on this bill. In fact, farmers and agricultural organizations will be limited to four hours of presentations on the afternoon of November 25 and all the hearings will be held in Toronto. As you may know, most farmers don't live in Toronto."

Mr. Hardeman went on to write: "We believe in protecting animal health and food safety; however, there are some serious concerns with this bill that need to be addressed to make it work for our agricultural industry. Stakeholder groups, while supportive of the goal, have expressed numerous concerns and asked for extensive consultations on the bill.

"Will you stay true to your beliefs and vote against the time allocation motion that limits debate on this important issue?"

That was signed by Ernie Hardeman, MPP for Oxford and the PC critic for agriculture and food.

We also had some notes under "General democracy." When Better Farming magazine called to ask the Minister of Agriculture why this bill was being rushed through, she said that this bill—her words—"is receiving the same due process that I believe the majority of bills that have been passed by this government has received." Given that this is the second time today, in my presence, while I've been in the assembly today, that a time allocation motion is being debated, perhaps that is accurate, but it certainly isn't something that I would be proud of if I were a member of government or if I were the minister.

This motion does more than just cut off debate in the Legislature; it also cuts off debate in the clause-by-clause committee hearings. If the government genuinely wants to make this legislation as good as it can be, why wouldn't they welcome amendments and want discussion around those amendments? Shouldn't we have a full and real discussion about how to amend the bill to ensure that it does in fact work for farmers?

Perhaps they already know that, true to form, they are going to turn down those amendments simply because they come from the opposition or from the third party. Perhaps they've already decided what amendments they will make, and they don't want to waste their time listening to the farmers and the people affected, who are stakeholders.

I have to admit that I'm still puzzled as to why the McGuinty government is time-allocating this bill. We aren't that far apart in our goals. We're all hearing from the same stakeholders with the same concerns.

There were a number of members of the other side who had some quotes. I'll just read them. Here's one: The parliamentary assistant to the minister said, "Our government has a very good record regarding bills going to committee, and I'm sure that this bill will go to committee to gather the input from stakeholders. That's part of what democracy is all about: hearing from the people who are most affected and most concerned about this bill." This isn't a member of the opposition asking for more time. It's the parliamentary assistant saying that committee hearings are what democracy is all about.

He wasn't the only member on that side of the House who promised there would be hearings, to hear from farmers and agricultural groups. The member for Brant said, "We will take this to committee. It's going to go to committee. The stakeholders will present and discuss and advise and recommend, and the opposition will have the same opportunity time and time again, as these bills have been, to have their points made and lay it on the table."

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The member for Northumberland–Quinte West said, "I look forward, once again, to going to committee, to have a full, wholesome debate at committee, to hear from those industry stakeholders and move on and get this done."

At this time I am going to close my remarks and look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I also want to participate in the debate on this motion. I am particularly interested, of course, in animal health and Bill 204. I was listening very carefully as the member from Hamilton East was talking about 300 organic chickens, or backyard chickens, as we commonly refer to them. I got the sense from him that he felt they didn't really need to comply with the types of regulations and standards that the larger chicken farm operations currently have. For myself as a former chicken producer—my son is now the chicken producer in our family—I think that for him it's important that there be a level playing field. When that chicken goes to market—whether it goes to market through a processor or through a farmgate sale or a farmers' market—when something goes wrong and a consumer becomes ill because of the consumption of that chicken, they don't recognize whether that came from a flock of 300 or less

or from a larger operation. To them, it is a chicken and they got sick from it, the word goes out through the media that there was a contaminated chicken, and suddenly everybody has to deal with the consequences of that. That's what makes this so important for all of us and that there be standards that everyone has to comply with.

Certainly in my riding we have organic chicken farms. They have standards that they of course have to comply with in order to be classified as organic. They're already accustomed to that kind of regulation and administrative work that they need to do to prove that their product is truly organic. There's a mix of different kinds of production in my riding. I have organic grain crops in my riding, there's beef, there's turkey, there's chicken, and all of these things are there currently. As I said, they are expected to comply with certain standards, and those standards are there to protect the farmers as much as they are to protect the consumers.

I have heard different people talk about, "Well, if this is for consumer benefit"—and certainly as a farmer, in the past I've often presented the argument that farmers should be compensated when there is a consumer benefit. But I think in this case the farmers actually benefit even more, because the farmers in this case have the assurance that they are going to be globally competitive, that standards are set, and that they will have a marketplace not just locally, not just nationally but internationally. They can talk about the fact that their product has the quality that it does and that everybody is working under the same umbrella of standards. So for me as a former producer—and I have to get used to that lingo. I can no longer talk about myself in a day-to-day type of production situation.

I think, in terms of the time allocation, that we need to move this forward. I think it's been said by others as well. There's certainly the situation that happened when we were first debating this in second debate, where we had the H1N1 outbreak in turkeys. It certainly demonstrates the fact that we need something in place. We need to have standards in place on how to react and what will happen when there is an outbreak. The legislation here represents a responsive, responsible and flexible way for us to address those situations so that everyone is protected: the consumer and the producer as well.

I feel that we need to have this legislation in place, certainly, for the producers and for the consumers. There was also the discussion about, and I heard someone talk about, experience on the combine, and I do recognize that this year we're later in harvest than we should be. There's no question about it. The weather has delayed a number of things. It delayed the planting initially; then we had the rains in the early fall which have now delayed the harvest. In terms of the timing of this, we certainly recognize that, but that is something, again, that we have to deal with.

Someone talked about being on the combine and being on the tractor—and the minister talked about how you can do a written submission. I can tell you that some of the best thinking time that any farmer can have is on their tractor or on their combine. You can have an amazing number of arguments and look at different viewpoints as you're sitting there thinking about an issue. Coming out that of type of time, that very productive time for most farmers, we would get some very good written submissions to the committee on what people feel are the strengths and the things that need to be improved in this particular piece of legislation. That, most farmers can do, as I said, from their combines, from their tractors. They can e-mail in, they can write in, and those things will be brought forward. So I certainly look forward to that kind of thing.

A number of organizations have been quoted by both the opposition and the government on this issue. At one point, and certainly during second debate, I heard a lot made of a letter sent to us by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I find that when we do debate, people tend to take out little snippets. They don't really read the entire content of the letter and they don't really convey the intent of the letter. When I heard people talking about what the OFA was talking about and what their concerns were, I went back to the letter and I thought, "I'm not sure if that was the same letter I read." I got into the letter and, as I read through, I realized that they actually are very much in support of this. They have things that they want to have us take very serious consideration of, but on the whole, they are in support of it.

I can certainly take the letter and read the little corners and the paragraphs out that say that, but when we do that kind of thing—like I said, if we don't read the letter in its entirety into the record, we leave an impression that there are some serious concerns or there's some serious opposition, and that is certainly not what I have seen when I talk to producers and when I read these letters. What I hear is: They think it's time we had this kind of legislation in place. We need to move this forward and we need to move it forward quickly. We have situations that can occur at any time. People want to have the assurance of a standard that will be there for them so they will know what's going to happen.

When something happens on my farm, I have a responsibility—or on my son's farm; I did it again. When something happens on my son's farm, we have a responsibility as a family to make sure that we contain that, that we don't spread that to our neighbours and to our fellow producers. That is irresponsible. If you are going to say to someone, "You can't come into my farm; you can't do an inspection"—if you are in a situation where you're not running an operation that's clean enough that an inspector can come in without a lot of notice or without permission, I have to question what kind of operation you're running, because most of us would say that we run an operation that could take a random inspection at any time without any problems and be proud to show the product and the kind of production that we have in those operations. And I know that my son is going to run the same kind of operation that his dad and I did.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm happy to make a few comments on Bill 204, An Act to protect animal health and to amend and repeal other Acts.

As my colleagues have already stated in my caucus, the Ontario PC caucus is truly committed to food safety and animal health. But while, on the surface, this seems like the right bill and the right thing to do, this bill goes beyond what is required to protect animal and human health. This bill, if passed, would create a system of permits and licences and would actually result in increased red tape and cost for farmers without the benefit of the good legislation that we were hoping for.

The agricultural community doesn't need to be bogged down with this government's redundant paperwork. They have too many other daily duties that they need to be taking care of and focusing on. They're the folks busy putting food on our table. This bill should be mindful of the busy schedules of the agricultural community and should be working to reduce red tape for them, not increase it.

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This bill also negatively impacts small business in urban areas. I have heard from small businesses in my riding of Burlington, and they too have concerns. Small businesses that have been in our community for over 50 years, butcher shops that have been serving our community without any incident, now have to jump through Liberal hoops. They feel that there is a lot of unfairness to small business in this bill. They are concerned that they have to go out on a limb and spend a great deal of money with absolutely no guarantee for this investment.

I also want to express my concern about these warrantless entries. This bill allowing inspectors the right to enter a premises without warrant isn't even democratic. For example, if this bill is passed, an inspector would be able to enter a premises, without a warrant, to check whether a farmer has the appropriate licences. In my opinion, and I know I'm not the only one to express these feelings, this bill goes too far and it does stomp on the rights of individuals.

This bill was sold to the stakeholders on the basis that it was about traceability. However, to our surprise, in terms of traceability, there's a small section in the bill on this, and then we have all this other stuff snuck into the bill. Even more insulting to these farmers, who have been doing their job for centuries, is that the one section allows—not mandates—the minister to set up a traceability framework. So there is not even a guarantee that this will happen. It simply allows her to do that. All these additional new government powers that are listed in this bill were never told to the stakeholders.

I would also like to touch on the position of the Chief Veterinarian of Ontario. While on the surface this seems like the right thing to do, the functions and powers of the Chief Veterinarian of Ontario are left to regulation. So at this point, we have very little insight into what the role will be. Unfortunately, as we often see, leaving portions of a bill to regulation means that they are addressed later and behind closed doors, without input from stakeholders.

It appears that in its current form, the only criteria necessary in this bill for the CVO are that he or she is a veterinarian who holds a licence without conditions or limitations and possesses qualifications that may be prescribed. I would like to know what those qualifications will be. I don't want to know later; I want to know now. I don't want to leave it to regulation. What about experience in farm animal veterinarian practices? As a comparison, under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, the chief medical officer of health is required to be a physician and to have five years of service. The act also stipulates that the CMO hold office for a term of five years. None of this is clear for the CVO.

The last point that I'd like to address is whether the CVO will issue an annual report, as is mandated for our chief medical officer of health. I think that an annual report is really a mechanism of accountability, and I will be interested to see whether that is something this government can stomach: accountability for the CVO, who would have to adhere to it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's my pleasure to stand up and speak about this bill again. We've had ongoing conversations about this bill over the last couple of weeks.

As we all know, this proposed Animal Health Act provides important measures to help us prevent, detect and respond to animal health issues in Ontario. Ontario is the only province currently without its own legislative powers to act to protect animal health within its borders, and I think we all know that this is something that needs to be addressed.

All animals have the potential to carry and transmit diseases that could pose risks to animal or human health, which is why this proposed legislation includes a broader definition of "animal" that includes not just livestock and poultry but, in fact, any creature that's not human. This is consistent with legislation in other provinces and was supported by industry partners during consultations that took place over the development of this.

The ministry has and will continue to consult using a variety of different methods to reach out to its industry partners and other stakeholders. This could include postings on its website, discussion papers, stakeholder meetings and public meetings, to name just a few. Regardless of the approach we use, we are committed to open and meaningful consultation with all agricultural stakeholders. I've been contacted at my office on a number of issues surrounding this, and we have an ongoing open relationship. That's part of how this government has operated.

The ministry will also continue to post regulations on the regulatory registry, wherever there's a potential impact on business, or on the Environmental Registry, if there's a potential for environmental impact.

Province-wide consultations were held in 2006 on an animal health strategy for Ontario. On June 18, 2009, a

news release was issued announcing the Ontario government's consultation on proposed farm animal health initiatives. We've already made a lot of efforts on this, and when people want to be involved in this process, it's a matter of sending in their information.

We're consistent with the legislation in other provinces, and it was supported by our industry partners during consultations that took place previous to the legislation getting announced.

Another broad definition that is used in this proposed legislation is that of "hazard." Experience around the world has shown that there are situations other than diseases which may require action to protect animal and human health. The proposal legislation includes other categories of hazards, which are chemical, radiological and physical. By referencing hazards beyond disease, the proposed legislation will allow us to address animal health concerns such as chemical contamination or metal shards in animal feed—the whole cross-section.

The proposed legislation also includes provisions for a chief veterinarian of Ontario to be appointed by the minister and have specific legislative powers. The chief veterinarian would also be a key link between animal and human health, with close ties to Ontario's chief medical officer of health. The proposed legislation outlines provisions for reporting specific animal health risks to the chief veterinarian, who will guide the response, which could be simply confirming that the hazard is not present, notifying industry to increase biosecurity or taking further action as needed. As we've said so many times in this debate, it's about protecting our food chain from the farm to the fork.

While the proposed legislation establishes reporting categories, I'd like to stress that the specific hazards that come under each of the headings would be developed in a regulation, should this legislation be passed. Our government is committed to consulting with our industry partners when developing this regulation to make sure that reporting requirements are appropriate.

The safety of health for both animal and human is the key part of this bill. Should the chief veterinarian become aware of any animal health issue that could pose a significant human health risk, he or she would be required to report this to the chief medical officer of health. This legislation, if passed, would make sure we are all working together to protect the province from potential hazards with animal or human health risks.

There has been a lot of controversy about the role of inspectors; it's been raised as an infringement on people's rights. This proposed legislation provides for inspectors to be appointed and to work under the guidance of the chief veterinarian for Ontario. These inspectors would become the primary responders for animal health issues in the province, and would be visiting specific premises should there be a reason to believe there is an animal health issue there. This part of the legislation is consistent with the powers of federal inspectors.

In addition to entering the premises, these staff would be able to inspect animals and related items, such as transportation vehicles. They could also take samples for testing and issue compliance or quarantine orders. It should be noted that inspectors would not be able to come into a private home unless they had consent or there was a warrant, and a warrant would not be sought unless there were exceptional circumstances.

1700

This bill outlines three escalating levels of controls that could be established to respond to an animal health risk. The first level is quarantine. Under the proposed legislation, if an inspector had reasonable grounds to believe that an animal health issue existed and needed to be contained, he or she could issue a quarantine order under the guidance of the Chief Veterinarian of Ontario. A quarantine order could involve isolating animals or related products, or posting signage to keep traffic out of the inspected premises. This is all to protect the food chain.

If the chief veterinarian believed that further monitoring for a certain hazard was required, a broader surveillance zone could be established for up to a 10-kilometre radius around the quarantined premises. Should more action be required, an animal health control area could be established which could cover an area broader than a quarantiner's surveillance zone, and only the minister could establish a control area. This could be involved where there was a problem in another province, or in another country, and we were concerned about protecting our food source. The minister could then set aside the area and set orders as to what can come into this country, because we have an obligation as a government to ensure that the food that is sold in this province is safe.

Now, this proposed legislation does establish a review system with respect to orders made by inspectors. Upon request, a director could review an inspector's order and may confirm, alter or revoke it. If it were absolutely necessary, this proposed legislation would allow for animals to be destroyed. We know that this is a necessary measure that, in certain circumstances, could be critical to the province's animal and human health. To assist the industry, should animals need to be destroyed, the proposed legislation provides the framework for compensation.

Now, under this, the ministry made a lot of information—I spoke to you earlier about the elements of the proposed animal health legislation on the ministry's website and the environmental registry. There were 34 written comments received from stakeholder organizations and the general public. All submissions were generally supportive of the legislation, while raising specific concerns and interests. Ministry staff have incorporated consultation feedback into the proposed legislation where possible. Ministry staff have also worked closely with staff at other ministries to ensure that the bill's content reflects their concerns.

You know, this is all about trying to get it right. I think the day that this Legislature comes up with the perfect legislation is probably the day when our work is all done. It's part of the process going through the whole sector and system.

Farmers need to know that we will help them with costs that they may face when addressing an animal health issue. Compensation provisions encourage reporting and are a vital part of the strong animal disease detection system. Legislation, though, is also meaningless if there are not adequate penalties for those who refuse to comply. The proposed legislation suggests strong penalties for any individual convicted of an offence under the act, should it be passed.

As you know, animal health issues not only have a devastating impact on the livestock and poultry sectors, but can impact human health and the provincial economy. It is important that this be taken very seriously, with serious penalties for non-compliance. If we know that things are taking place, we can always address those issues through a number of systems. The most serious, of course, are penalties for non-compliance. If we do this, we can move forward on things.

We've talked in here—this, of course, is controversial today—about time allocation. I would just like to say that our government has given more third reading debate time to its time allocation bills than the past governments have. Under the past government, of course, we've heard that 29 out of 66 bills, time-allocated, received no committee time, and 30 received no third reading debate. Only six of our government's time-allocated bills did not receive committee time, and only four did not receive third reading debate.

If this motion passes, when the bill reaches the standing committee, stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed legislation. If stakeholders are unable to make it to Toronto, they can submit their feedback in writing. All submissions, whether written or in person, will be considered by the standing committee. And if Bill 204 is passed and proclaimed into force, the ministry plans to consult with industry on future regulations, including the list of reportable and notifiable hazards. OMAFRA will continue to consult with industry partners as we move forward on these initiatives and work with federal and provincial colleagues to ensure that provincial-level traceability is set up.

Now, as we know, the federal government announced this past summer that they plan to introduce a federal traceability system. Our comments in this bill, Bill 204, state that the minister "may" put forward a traceability system. The reason it says "may" as opposed to "shall" is that if the federal government is going forward with these regulations, then it's incumbent upon to us work with them so that we develop a national traceability standard.

As important as it is to have that type of legislation and those types of regulations in place in Ontario, it's equally important to have it right across the country because, ultimately, it will protect the agricultural sector from coast to coast. We know that when there was the outbreak of mad cow a few years ago, the whole border was shut down. The whole industry ran into problems across the country, which had a huge cost to our agricultural sector, and this is what this bill sets out to remedy.

Just some of the issues that our government has dealt with since coming to power in 2003: We've provided over $1.5 billion in farm income support programs; our government has committed more than $50 million to its Pick Ontario Freshness strategy; we have increased the number of meat inspectors from 10 to 170; we have announced a three-year risk management program to support the grains and oilseeds sector, and through this program, $50 million has been provided to farmers to date; 240 projects have been approved through the rural economic development program, with a total provincial commitment of over $77.5 million; and we've currently got a 10-year agreement with the University of Guelph, which will provide $300 million over the next five years to help it continue its top-notch agri-food and rural research and development programs, animal health and food testing services, and veterinarian education.

The province is recognizing innovation in our province's agriculture sector by creating the five-year, $2.5-million Premier's Awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. We've held five Premier's agri-food summits to help forge a shared vision that will allow the industry to seize new opportunities. Part of that shared-vision conversation led to the development of this bill. We've signed on to Growing Forward, a new national policy framework for the agriculture, agri-food and agri-based industry, offering $300 million in new programming to the sector. The provincial government has committed up to $115 million for broadband projects through Rural Connections initiatives which are to benefit our farming community and our agricultural community.

There are a number of issues that this legislation will deal with. As we know, it will also consolidate a number of acts. It sets out a detailed framework for improving our detection of and response to animal health issues to better protect our province's animals and its people.

If this bill passes, work will still need to be done to develop the regulations, and this will be done with full consultation with our various stakeholders, because we're committed to developing those regulations in consultation with our industry partners.

This bill will move forward, and I'm very pleased to be involved in the discussion today as it moves forward. There are, of course, a number of issues which we will still have to deal with, and I look forward to taking part in the consultation process and hearing from the various associations that are involved in this sector. We will eventually come up with something that hopefully everyone will support, because it's incumbent upon us to do this for our agriculture community, to make sure that our system's foods are safe. When you see a grown-in-Ontario or a made-in-Ontario stamp on food, you'll know that it's safe; you can be guaranteed that it's safe. I think that will be one of the best selling points that we can make to the world, that Ontario food products are safe and we can guarantee that.

I thank you for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you for the opportunity to make a few comments with respect to the time allocation of debate on Bill 204, the Animal Health Act.

This is the second bill today where we've debated time allocation. We just completed debate earlier this afternoon on Bill 212, the so-called good government bill.

When you speak about good government, I would say that good government consists of making informed decisions in an open and transparent manner. What we've heard the McGuinty government do is talk about making informed decisions in a transparent manner, but certainly their actions don't match their words.

Bill 204, the Animal Health Act, is a prime example of this. It started, of course, with time allocation in second reading, and it's a practice which is being used with increasing regularity by this government, I should note. Unfortunately, on this side of the House we're getting used to that; we're used to you not listening to us ever.

But I think the real shame here is the real injustice that's being done to the people of Ontario, and particularly to farmers and members of our agricultural community. In this situation, on Bill 204, this government has decided to hold public hearings on just one day, for four hours on November 25. All of the hearings are being held in Toronto—if you can imagine, on an agricultural bill, to hold hearings in downtown Toronto on one afternoon. What we've suggested, in the amendment that has been put forward by my colleague the member from Oxford, is that a series of hearings be held in different locations across the province of Ontario, including Stratford, Guelph and—

Mr. John O'Toole: Lindsay.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: —Lindsay as well; thank you to the member from Durham for reminding me of that.

I think it is important that we take this bill to where the members of the agricultural community are. It simply doesn't make sense to expect them to come to downtown Toronto. This is a bill of significant importance, and just to hold hearings on one day in downtown Toronto is just showing how arrogant and out of touch this government really is with the people of Ontario. They don't care. They don't want to know. They don't want to hear about what's important to people.

It's also not what we were led to believe by the comments that were made by several of the members of the government when this bill was introduced. In that regard I would just like to read a quotation from the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock on October 19, who said, "Our government has a very good record regarding bills going to committee, and I'm sure that this bill will go to committee to gather the input from stakeholders. That's part of what democracy is all about: hearing from the people who are most affected and most concerned about this bill." Well, so much for that.

In addition, we heard the Minister of Agriculture say, "As yet, we do not have a national traceability framework, but we are, in this legislation—and we certainly are looking forward to debating it in this Legislature, going to committee with it and getting feedback from our stakeholders, particularly on this traceability piece." Once again, we're not seeing the actions match the words.

Unfortunately, I don't have too much more time to say anything, but I would just like to finish by saying that I would like to move adjournment of the debate on this matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Whitby–Oshawa has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1714 to 1744.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

You can take your seats, please.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 14; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

The time allocated for debate on government notice of motion 141 has expired. I'm now required to put the question. We will first deal with the amendment by the member for Halton to government notice of motion 141.

Mr. Chudleigh has moved that the motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 204, Animal Health Act, 2009, be amended as follows:

By deleting it and replacing it with "That the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet as follows:

"On Wednesday, November 25, 2009, in Toronto; on Monday, December 14, 2009, in Stratford; on Tuesday, December 15, 2009, in Guelph; and on Wednesday, December 16, 2009, in Lindsay, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and on January 13 and January 20, 2010, during its regular meeting times, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill."

In the fourth paragraph, by deleting "Tuesday, December 1, 2009" and replacing it with "Monday, January 11, 2010;"

In the fifth paragraph, by deleting "December 2, 2009" and replacing it with "February 16, 2010;" and

In the seventh paragraph, by deleting "one hour" and replacing it with "six hours."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

I have been handed a note.

"The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request the vote on the motion by Mr. Chudleigh to the amendment of government notice of motion 141"—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This doesn't say that—that 141 be deferred until November 17, 2009, signed by the chief government whip. Therefore, all votes will be deferred.

Vote deferred.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND SAFETY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT AUX NORMES TECHNIQUES ET À LA SÉCURITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 5, 2009, on a motion for second reading of Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 187, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes techniques et la sécurité et la Loi de 1996 sur l'application de certaines lois traitant de sécurité et de services aux consommateurs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think this evokes one memory of the time of the explosion in York region. This government looked at it for six months and did nothing. Now they're trying to hide under the darkness of night, and they easily could have invoked another time allocation motion, but they don't want to deal with the HST. That's the story of today. They don't want to deal with the harmonized sales tax—8% more for every expenditure that every family in Ontario will be making.

We've called on this government to hold public hearings on the bill they introduced today on the harmonized sales tax: "Let the people speak," but they won't. They bring in Bill 187. Bill 187 is a—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: What's before us is Bill 187, which deals with the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, an amendment to that act. He's speaking about everything but Bill 187. He's out of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That is a point of order, and I would ask the members to keep their comments to the bill that's before the House.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is the problem. We've had two time allocation motions in one day. This is the third bill. They're trying to confuse the public on the very important issue of the harmonized sales tax.

1750

We're pleased to debate public safety. We're pleased to debate Bill 204. But this government doesn't want the people of Ontario to see the game they're playing. Look at this; it's a shell game. This isn't about the Sunrise incident, where a propane dispensing firm blew up and caused a lot of public damage and public risk. This bill here—we certainly want to be civil about it and strengthen the safety in Ontario, but look at the mess they're making of H1N1. They couldn't manage a catastrophe if it was handed to them on a plate.

I can't believe for one moment—they've just introduced the third bill. You should probably time-allocate this motion.

So, in the interests of public participation, I'm going to move that we adjourn the debate on Bill 187.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. O'Toole has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1821.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. O'Toole has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour—

Mr. David Zimmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm wondering—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, the vote is under way.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

Take your seats.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 4; the nays are 29.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock on Tuesday, November 17.

The House adjourned at 1822.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margarett R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Publications

No. 187

Nº 187

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Première session, 39e législature

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 17 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 17 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the aboriginal prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS ACT (LIVE-IN CAREGIVERS AND OTHERS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉTRANGERS DANS LE CADRE DE L'EMPLOI (AIDES FAMILIAUX ET AUTRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 5, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: We're here once again to debate Bill 210. We all agree that we need to protect foreign live-in caregivers. But we have to ask, why does the Liberal government believe there is no other way to defend foreign caregivers without trampling on the rights of others? Why does the government believe that they should defend foreign caregivers by giving employment standards officers the right to warrantless entry into private homes? Why do they believe that the Ministry of Labour should be allowed to conduct fishing expeditions on whatever property they deem fit, without even consulting a judge or a justice? Why is it that this government is destroying an entire live-in caregiver industry, destroying the livelihoods of those who help bring caregivers to this country?

Contrary to the beliefs of this minister, not all of those who help bring foreign caregivers into this country are heartless profiteers. Not all employment agencies exploit live-in caregivers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me; I believe that you have spoken to this bill. You will relinquish—thank you.

Further debate? The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to speak to this bill today. Last spring, when the stories started to appear in the newspapers about the difficulties, the problems, the challenges and the unfairness that had been visited upon the heads of live-in caregivers, it became clear that legislation—government action—was required to alleviate the very difficult circumstances that some of these caregivers found themselves under. I don't want to suggest in any way that all families that employed live-in caregivers were abusive to their caregivers, but there was certainly a segment of our society that was taking advantage of live-in caregivers.

It was for that reason, to protect our most vulnerable, that our government stepped in and decided to take required action in this matter, and we now find the result of that initiative in Bill 210. What I would like to do is just highlight some of the matters in Bill 210 and explain why they've been brought forward, what they are intended to do and how the provisions in Bill 210 will protect some of the most vulnerable in our society: live-in caregivers.

It's a particularly poignant problem, because the paradox, or the irony, is that our society often relies on these live-in caregivers to care for the most vulnerable in our society: young children and senior citizens. Families in their busy lives, mothers and fathers working and managing their careers often make use of live-in caregivers to look after young children and elderly parents. So now we have a situation where we have, in many cases, vulnerable live-in care workers being asked to look after vulnerable seniors and young children, and it's incumbent upon our society to give the same protection to the vulnerable caregivers as we give to young children and senior citizens, whom the live-in caregivers are often called upon to care for.

Here are some of the highlights of Bill 210. First, it applies to foreign nationals who are employed in Ontario as live-in caregivers or in such other positions in sectors as may be prescribed by regulation—so, other employment. Right now, the legislation applies to live-in caregivers, but there is the potential to expand it to cover other types of prescribed employment; that is, protecting vulnerable workers.

Number two, the legislation provides that persons who act as recruiters in connection with employing these foreign nationals are prohibited from charging the foreign

national a fee. What has happened in the past is that a recruiter has gone out and recruited a foreign national as a caregiver and arranged for them to come to Canada and accept a placement here in Ontario, and then charged a fee to the foreign caregiver, often in addition to a fee charged to the employer of that foreign caregiver. Under this legislation, those kinds of fees that are charged to foreign caregivers—again, the most vulnerable employees here in Ontario—are proscribed. They are forbidden. The money that is paid to the foreign caregiver will be their money. They will keep that money, and there will be no further fees. That's an abuse that Bill 210 has stopped.

0910

A third thing that we find in Bill 210 is that employers of foreign nationals are prohibited from recovering fees from the employee, because a backdoor way for a recruiter to get around not collecting fees is to say to the employee, the caregiver, "We're not going to charge you a fee." A caregiver comes to Ontario, accepts the placement, and lo and behold, where they've accepted the placement, the family then tries to recover their fee or a part of the fee they have paid the recruiter. So we have to nip that in the bud too. That's exactly what Bill 210 does.

A fourth thing that Bill 210 does is prohibit employers, where they're working, and prohibit recruiters, who have arranged for them to take the placement here in Ontario, from taking possession, retaining or controlling in any way their travel documents, in particular their passport.

One of the abuses that we heard about in this past year was a caregiver who was brought into the province, surrendered their passport and other travel documents either to their employer, the family or their recruiter, who then held those documents as a lien or as a method of controlling travel, placement and where the foreign caregiver could move around in the province.

These vulnerable employees coming to Ontario with the very best of intentions, to care for our young children and our senior citizens, were in many ways trapped. The employer or the recruiter seized their passport and travel documents and would give them back on payment of fees. So that has been proscribed.

A fifth thing that this legislation has done to protect these vulnerable workers is that the employer and the recruiter are now required to post copies of various documents that are published by the director of employment standards. These documents contain rights that the vulnerable care workers have. It contains a description of the obligations of the employer, the family, and of the recruiter.

Often when foreign-trained care workers come into the province, their first language may not be English or they may have a limited capacity in English. It's often their first visit to Canada, and they find themselves in a new regime—in many ways a strange, foreign regime. It all becomes a blur as to what they can do, what their rights and obligations are and what their employers' rights and obligations are.

We've now done a couple of things, and you can see the progression of this. We've said you can't charge them fees, you can't take their travel documents, and now, you've got to post—you've got to give them in writing—a statement of what their rights are and what the obligations of their employers are, so that they can sit back and decide and have some sense of whether they are being treated fairly, whether they are being treated according to the law.

The legislation goes a step further. As I've said, often the first language is not English or there is a limited capacity in English, so the legislation requires that if their first language is not English, they be given a translated copy of the postings from the director of employment standards. The ministry will work on the translation of various documents explaining rights and obligations.

So now we have a situation where, in addition to prohibiting fees and the seizure of travel documents, we have what amounts to an empowerment of these vulnerable employees. One of the ways of empowering these vulnerable employees is to in fact tell them in English, or in their own language through translated documents, exactly what their rights are and what the obligations of their employers and their recruiters are. That is a huge step, because my sense, and the sense I gathered from reading the reports in the newspapers and from many conversations with vulnerable employees, is that although they had a sense that they were being taken advantage of, they weren't sure just what the letter of the law was: what their protections were, what their rights were and what the obligations of their employers and recruiters are.

We are providing that information in a very concrete, clear, written manner, so that there is a level playing field. The vulnerable care worker now has access to documentation that explains their situation, and the employer and the recruiter also has a very clear statement in writing as to what their obligations are. One of the first steps in creating a level playing field for vulnerable care workers, their family employers and their recruiters is to make sure they're all reading from the same rule book. That's what this legislation is designed to do.

The legislation goes on and has a series of prescriptions that address the issue of: What if there is a situation in the employment relationship with the vulnerable care worker, their employer or the recruiter that is out of whack, if you will, and that is the subject matter of a complaint? Well, there is a complaints process set up in Bill 210. It lays out what a vulnerable care worker who is covered by this legislation can do to enforce those rights that are set out in the documents they will have from the director of employment standards. There's a regime, a process, to handle complaints from vulnerable care workers.

Let me touch on some of the aspects of how that complaints process will work. Essentially, the complaint will make its way to employment standards. Here is the very significant piece of this legislation: The employment standards officer, on receipt of the complaint, has some powers and authority. To date, it has been unclear what

employment standards officers could do with respect to a complaint from an in-home care worker. Under this legislation, employment standards officers are permitted to undertake an inspection and an investigation, and they can require employers and recruiters to post various notices to correct deficiencies or correct actions that are inconsistent and/or illegal under this act.

There's also a very clear and distinct penalty provision in the legislation for contraventions of the act. If the rights of a vulnerable live-in care worker are alleged to have been violated, there's now a process to investigate that complaint in a meaningful way. If the complaint is established, there are a number of things that can follow from that. There are corrective or remedial measures that can be taken via the issuance of notices to employers and recruiters. There is also the imposition of penalties on the recruiter and on the family employer.

0920

This is a comprehensive piece of legislation. It was clear that this was an aspect of the employment world in our society that needed addressing—in many ways, it was almost an underworld economy that was there. We had people working as care workers—again, as I said before, vulnerable workers—often on their first visit to North America, often on their first visit to the western world. Often their first language was not English, and if they did have some command of English, it was limited at best. There was a very clear sense in the media, in the public and in this Legislature that this was an area of employment that in many ways had escaped our notice. I think we were probably all aware that there were issues and problems there, but in the past year, those issues and problems came to a head in a number of quite public and heart-wrenching and touching cases. So our government stepped up to the plate.

We've heard from the vulnerable care workers. We've also heard from responsible employers and from responsible recruiters, because although I've stressed the difficult circumstances that many vulnerable care workers find themselves in, there are many, many responsible employers and recruiters, and they've worked with us and with the care workers and some of the agencies that represent and take a particular interest in vulnerable care workers to help give us some advice in drafting this legislation.

The legislation, like most legislation before this House, is designed to root out a particular piece of mischief or misconduct, and the particular piece of mischief or misconduct here is the taking advantage of vulnerable care workers.

There's another aspect that has cropped up in a number of questions that have been raised in this chamber and in the media; that is, why doesn't Ontario follow the model of the legislation that the province of Manitoba has in addressing this issue? I just want to take a couple of minutes to address this.

The Manitoba model is a licensing regime where the recruiter has to be licensed in order to recruit employees and bring them into the province of Manitoba. Manitoba approaches it by putting some very tight controls and rules and regulations on the recruitment process through a licensing regime. If you don't have a licence as a recruiter, you can't recruit foreign care workers. We looked at the licensing regime and heard from live-in caregivers, and we determined that the best way to ensure protection here in Ontario is through a complete fee ban, a strong enforcement of that fee ban, a strong enforcement of prescribed rights for foreign live-in care workers and a very precise regime of prescribed obligations for their employers or the recruiters who recruit them, along with stiff penalties that can be applied to the employer or the recruiter.

How does our legislation specifically differ from the Manitoba legislation? Well, the Manitoba act focuses on administration, with a recruiter licensing and employment registration regime. The Ontario legislation focuses on strong enforcement and stiff penalties with respect to the rules covering the employment relationship. We also have a number of very innovative prohibitions and prescriptions of the obligations of employers.

Unlike Manitoba's legislation, violations here in Ontario, if they are really quite outrageous and egregious, could result in very substantial financial penalties and perhaps even incarceration. In addition, if the Ontario legislation is passed, Ontario would be the only jurisdiction in Canada to ban the withholding of passports and other personal documents. The idea of withholding passports and other documents as a way of imposing the employer's or the recruiter's will on these vulnerable foreign workers is, from the workers' point of view, really quite a fearsome—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always enjoy listening to the member from Willowdale. In fact, I think he made a very, very good point.

I'm really anxious to see something quite new put on the table here. I'd like to have the Manitoba model tabled so all members can be refreshed on that option, because really, when I look at Bill 210—and there are sections of it, of course. We are very much supportive of protecting all workers, not just vulnerable workers. All workers need protection—we understand that—especially persons who may have been wrongly informed or inappropriately managed by recruiters and other people. Let's be very clear on that.

But, thanks to the member from Willowdale raising the point, we now want a full briefing on the Manitoba model before we can support this, because this model has some structural problems that we've drawn to the attention of the minister and others.

I'm just going to mention here in the brief time—I wish I could get more time here, though; I'm running out of time. On page 18 of the bill, and specifically on section 34, which is the investigation and inspection powers section, it's a bit overarching and a bit strong there;

posting of notices, section 37, is another part; and section 40, offences in general. These are sections that need a little more clarity in terms of what are the repercussions for an inspection officer coming in under a whistle-blower type of event, where someone said something untoward has happened and the inspector comes in to the privacy—this warrantless entry provision is completely unacceptable in a democratic society. You have to prove in some kind of court that you have justifiable reason for needing this warrantless entry.

I think that if we looked at the Manitoba model, we might come to a consensus here. Isn't that what we're trying to do, to move forward—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Willowdale, and with the greatest of respect, he is like so many other Ontarians who do not understand immigration, immigration law, immigration policy and immigration abuse.

With the greatest of respect, I did work there for more than 20 years, and I will tell you, if there is a way to exploit the vulnerable, people will find it. People will find that exploitation.

We can see today in the province of Ontario that there are unscrupulous immigration consultants, unscrupulous recruiters, unscrupulous people who take advantage of new immigrants.

The province of Ontario, if they want to put an end to it, has to adopt the Manitoba model. You have to license people in order to be able to shut them down immediately when they fail.

I fail to understand what the member from Willowdale was talking about, saying that our model is different and our model is superior. Our model is not superior when you have to go through a long process in order to try to help those who are vulnerable. They have no roots. They have no ability to stay. With a three- or four-year proceeding in order to take someone to court, the chief witness will in all likelihood be gone.

We need the province of Ontario to stand up for foreign workers, we need them to put in a licensing provision, but we also need them—and it has not been talked about—to go back to the federal government and talk about how morally reprehensible the foreign worker program is.

We should be bringing people here to Canada with full rights of immigration. They should come with papers. They cannot be exploited in anywhere near the same way that those who are coming temporarily are.

There was a time when there was only a small agricultural program for foreign workers. Then we expanded it to nannies. Then Canada expanded it to literally hundreds of places, and it just is not working. The government is not addressing—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

0930

Mr. Mike Colle: I certainly agree with the member from East York that we've got over 200,000 part-time foreign workers now coming in every year with no controls, so it's right: The federal government is basically asleep at the switch, just opening the door with no controls, no support.

The member from Willowdale I think also touched on the humanity of this, and I appreciate that, but it's so rich to hear the Tories stand up and say they want the Manitoba model, when they're the ones that stripped all these protections away from temporary workers, foreign workers, when they were in power.

Then the member from Durham has got the gall to stand up and talk about warrantless entry in inspecting working conditions. It was the Tories that put that in. It was their government that put in the warrantless entry. Now they say that's undemocratic. As you know, in labour standards, labour inspectors have the right to inspect places of work. In this case here, if it's someone's home, they don't have the right to warrantless entry. But it's so incredible to hear the retro explanations of the Tories. They're the ones that took all these protections away so that these vultures, the human traffickers that traffic and exploit foreign workers, like caregivers, were given free rein by the Tories. Now they're saying they need more protection. The member from Durham should apologize and leave this chamber for that kind of disgusting thing. They took away the rights. Now they say, "You need more protections."

Anyways, this is a reasoned approach. For the first time in the government of Ontario's history we're protecting foreign nationals in the workplace, and it's about time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Further comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It was interesting listening to the debate here and the member referring to "those vultures." Of course, the vultures who exploit these caregivers—the most noted and infamous vulture was the Liberal member of the federal House, Ruby Dhalla. That's the vulture he wants to prevent, and I would agree that we should prevent them. I'm sure that under the Manitoba model, Ruby Dhalla would not get a licence. That's what we should be looking at in this bill. I agree with the member from Willowdale, and I really appreciate him standing up and speaking about how good the Manitoba model is and how we should be looking to copy that Manitoba model and prevent those vultures the member for the cricket club was referring to.

Anyway, there is significant irony here. The Liberals are trying to protect the rights of foreign live-in workers. We agree with that, of course. But to trample on civil liberties, to deny people the privacy of their own home, to allow for warrantless entries, to trample on everybody else's rights for the protection of another: Even the most elementary of debaters would understand and realize that

you don't protect some by harming others. You don't protect some by harming others.

Anyway, I do believe that this licensing arrangement under the Manitoba model would be effective. It would prevent the vultures, like the Liberal member Ruby Dhalla, from ever being involved, and it would allow us to provide those opportunities for foreign live-in caregivers to come to this country and seek and retain gainful—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The member for Willowdale has two minutes to respond.

Mr. David Zimmer: With respect to the Manitoba model, look, the Manitoba model was a good start in its day. The fact of the matter is that the Ontario model in Bill 210 is a better model, it's a stronger model, and here's why it's a better and a stronger model: It vests—it vests—rights in the vulnerable care worker. That's where you want the rights vested. Here's is what our model does: For example, a violation of the proposed legislation would result in a maximum penalty for an individual of $50,000 and possible jail time. Manitoba's legislation provides a maximum penalty of $25,000 and no jail time. Talk about focusing the mind of the employer and/or the recruiter. The focusing that the legislation brings to this is powerful. The rights that the vulnerable worker has will be vested in that vulnerable worker. Those rights are going to have to be posted—posted—by the employer and/or the recruiter. If the working language of the care worker is not English, they're going to have to post a translated copy of those rights and obligations. It's a way of vesting these protections, vesting these rights, on the person of the vulnerable care worker. The officers in the employment standards ministry now have the power to investigate, the power to interview, the power to conduct a very detailed analysis of what's going on in a situation where a care worker is being taken advantage of. These are powerful rights in the Ontario model.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate, this debate will be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: No further debate, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Therefore, this debate is adjourned.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND SAFETY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT AUX NORMES TECHNIQUES ET À LA SÉCURITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 16, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 187, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes techniques et la sécurité et la Loi de 1996 sur l'application de certaines lois traitant de sécurité et de services aux consommateurs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate. The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real pleasure this morning to continue the remarks on Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996.

Yesterday, without House leaders' agreement, they brought this bill forward at the end of the sessional day, at about 5:57, which I felt was a little unfair. At that time, we stood because we find that public safety issues are very important, especially in this time of H1N1. The pandemic plan for the province of Ontario is a good example of the planning, or lack of it, that this McGuinty government is able to execute.

In almost every area that I look at—the economy, how is it doing? Terrible—300,000 jobs. The managing of the government expenditures: a deficit of almost $25 billion. The resignation of a minister; another minister involved in a court issue, another member involved in a court issue; a deputy minister resigning; $1 million a day in consultant fees—unaccounted for, by the way. You look at H1N1: Is there a lineup; is there enough or is there not? I don't think they can manage anything.

I am so disappointed right now in what's going on in Ontario under the McGuinty government that I have no choice but to make one statement first—these debates seem to be falling on deaf ears. We want the government to commit to public, province-wide hearings on the new HST. This is the largest single tax grab in the province's history and they want to ram it through without consulting the public.

So I'm going to say that based on this government's unwillingness to work in consensus and co-operation, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. O'Toole has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0939 to 1009.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. O'Toole has moved adjournment of the debate. I ask all those in favour of the motion to please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 42; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion won.

Second reading debate adjourned.

ONTARIO LABOUR MOBILITY ACT, 2009

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2009 SUR LA MOBILITÉ DE LA MAIN-D'OEUVRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 29, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure for me to participate in this debate on Bill 175, which I think is a very important piece of legislation for the economy of Ontario and, indeed, the economy of Canada.

Just at the outset I'd like to give a little bit of a summary of what Bill 175 is about, what the principle behind it is. Many in this Legislature, and indeed many who are watching this debate on television, may be surprised to learn that in Canada, a country which boasts a number of regulated authorities, a number of occupations for which you need special training and certification—here in Ontario, about 300 such occupations—if you receive that training, and I'll give a few examples such as an architect, a veterinarian, an engineer and an audiologist—once you've completed your education or training, you must go forward and receive a certification. Many might be surprised to learn that despite the fact that we are a single nation—that we are a single market, so to speak, in many cases—if you receive this accreditation in one province or territory, if you want to move to another province or territory, you cannot freely practise that trade, that profession, that what-have-you.

This has been an issue which has been long-standing here in the country of Canada. I think all of us have recognized sometimes the irony that despite the fact that we are a nation, there are barriers between different provinces and territories. The fact of the matter is, we need to move to eliminate those barriers as best we can so that we can move forward and compete. I think people are aware of some of those efforts that have taken place. In 1994, the Agreement on Internal Trade was passed, which was an effort by all the provinces in co-operation with the federal government to remove many of these trade barriers. Included in that was the notion of labour mobility.

Unfortunately, I hate to report that about 14 years later, in 2008 when this next came up on the public agenda, not much had happened, and many of these interprovincial barriers still existed; that is, an architect, a veterinarian, a what-have-you in one province couldn't as easily move to another province or territory and take up their regulated profession. They had to jump through hoops and sometimes they were denied because they didn't have experience in that particular province and they were forced to undertake further training.

This became, as I say, a focus in 2008 among Premiers as they met at the Council of the Federation meeting. I want to pay a tribute to the leadership of our Premier in bringing this forward, along with his colleagues, and making a commitment that all provinces would work together to remove these barriers. What was proposed was a very simple rule, a simple philosophy, which underlies the legislation that we're discussing here today. That is that if a person who is part of a regulated profession is recognized in one province, they are in a sense recognized in all provinces and territories. In other words, an architect from Saskatchewan who has received their accreditation there can come to Ontario and hang up his or her shingle and practise.

When you think about it, there's a certain logic to this. All of us in this Legislature have had a chance to travel throughout the country, both on personal business and also on legislative business. I don't think any of us who enter a building in Saskatchewan, to take the architect example, are fearful that somehow an architect in Saskatchewan does not meet the same standards as an architect in Ontario. The principle is that if these various professions—as I say, in Ontario we are looking at about 300 occupations—have received accreditation in one province, that will take place in other provinces moving forward—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. It being 10:15 of the clock, the House stands recessed until 10:30.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'm delighted to welcome to the House today David Wolfe, from my riding, who is the dad of Sam Wolfe, one of our great new pages in the batch that just started yesterday.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: In the gallery we have members of the Halton Regional Police Association: Walt Bucci, Irene Kun and Rick Lostracco.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce my daughter Sheri Miller, who is here with her classmates who will be graduating this year from the registered nursing program at the University of Western Ontario: Jillian Dodman, Carmen Romero, Rachel Rollings and Bera Garcia.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very pleased to introduce the president of the University of Windsor, who has joined us in the House today. President Alan Wildeman is here, and we welcome him and invite all MPPs to a reception that the University of Windsor is hosting downstairs in the dining room this evening between 5 and 7 p.m. Welcome, Dr. Wildeman.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): He's also a constituent of the riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to introduce Michael Schmidt, who is here on the third anniversary of the famous MNR raid on his farm. He's a farmer in Grey county.

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce four officers from the Greater Sudbury Police Service. They are Jim Gibson, Marc Guerin, Greg McDonald and Dan Zembrzycki. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I too want to welcome the fine officers from the city of Greater Sudbury, but also all the police officers in the province of Ontario who are here for their lobby day, represented by their executive: Larry Molyneaux, the president; CAO Ron Middel; Karl Walsh, president of OPPA, the Ontario Provincial Police Association; and Mike McCormack from the Toronto Police Service.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to welcome Karen Selick, a member of the Canadian Constitution Foundation, joining us at the Park today supporting Michael Schmidt.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd also like to welcome the Hamilton Police Association and their members.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to introduce members of the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario, who are here for their 86th semi-annual meeting at Queen's Park: President Thelma McGillivray; board members Sheila Pepper, Beverlee McIntosh, Shirley Browne, Carol Canzona, May Toth, Marnie Sherritt, Margaret Jennings; and members Denise Mattock, Connie Zboch, Juno Piltz, Sheila McAuliffe, Eileen Lackie, Susan Jaap, Luba Podolsky, Barb Skelton, Mary Potter, Cynthia Dobrindt, Gracia Janes and Kim Ivan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to welcome, from Kitchener–Waterloo, Catherine Thompson, Kevin Crowley, Hélène Crowley and Elizabeth Crowley. They are the family of my page, Simon.

Hon. John Milloy: I too have a delegation as part of the police association meetings here today at Queen's Park. I'd like to welcome, in the visitors' gallery, Mike Sullivan, Paul Perchaluk, Laurie Cartwright and Amanda Harrald from my community.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On behalf of my page, Vanessa Van Decker, I would like to introduce her mother, Maureen Madigan, and her friend Cavalena Cawthray, who are joining us in the gallery today.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to welcome the grade 5 students from St. Patrick school in Ajax, who will be arriving here at about 11 o'clock. I thank their teachers and parents. This is the school that Minister Watson spoke on very recently, in reference to Greenbelt Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Paisley Murray and the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, we'd like to welcome her mother, Carol Heck, her grandmother Una Murray, and her grandfather David Murray. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Niagara Falls and page Alana Fansolato, we welcome her mother, Carina Fansolato, to the Legislature today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Barrie and page Jordan Morello, I'd like to welcome his sister Olivia Morello, his father, Renzo Morello, and his mother, Carol Veale-Morello, to the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery the Consul General of the Portuguese republic here in Toronto, Mr. Júlio Vilela. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guest to the Legislature today. Welcome, Consul General.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members to join me as we allow the pages to assemble for official introduction.

Hadhy Ayaz, Halton; Nickolas Barbieri, Etobicoke–Lakeshore; Melissa Bray, Pickering–Scarborough East; Simon Crowley, Kitchener–Waterloo; Christopher Dabner, Burlington; Alana Fansolato, Niagara Falls; Paisley Murray, Oak Ridges–Markham; Saeyon Mylvaganam, Beaches–East York; Connor Niedbala, Etobicoke Centre; Jamie Sheidow, London North Centre; Valerie Steckle, Huron–Bruce; Vanessa Van Decker, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke; Samuel Wolfe, Nipissing; Cairistiona Federico, Brampton–Springdale; Olivia Hughes, Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington; Maggie Hutchinson, Durham; Iman Kassam, Mississauga South; Karen Lin, Willowdale; Robyn Lin, Don Valley West; Nicolas McWatters, Parkdale–High Park; Jordan Morello, Barrie.

Welcome to all our pages. Enjoy your time here at Queen's Park.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 71(a), the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has given notice of his intention to file a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. Bill 218 may therefore not be called during orders of the day today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is for the Premier. Why are you choosing to exempt newspapers from your sales tax grab but not other sources of news, like magazines, Internet service or cable news?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The tax package that we're providing Ontarians with—the personal tax cuts, the corporate tax cuts as well as the implementation of a more efficient form of tax—is the right package of tax

changes, including the exemptions that we have provided for.

The Leader of the Opposition will be aware that we've provided a number of other exemptions.

The government has determined that those exemptions, including the newspaper exemption, are the appropriate exemptions in the context of the broader tax package, which will create more than 590,000 net new jobs in Ontario.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Frankly, I'm disappointed the Premier didn't respond to a very simple and direct question. Let me try again. Ontario families are concerned that instead of listening to those who are going to foot the bills, you're more concerned about listening to high-priced Liberal lobbyists and insiders like Jason Grier, who might as well have hung out a shingle to say, "If you want access to George Smitherman, come through me."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member that we refer to members by their riding names.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The member for Toronto Centre–Rosedale. Thank you, Speaker.

Ontario families will wonder why Premier McGuinty is cutting a special side deal for newspapers but is going to make working families and retirees pay 8% more for gas for their car, heat for their home, Internet bills, cable bills, and the list goes on.

I ask the Premier directly: Does the exemption for newspapers have anything to do with the fact that Jason Grier is a lobbyist for the newspaper association?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have provided a number of exemptions under the HST as well as the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member for Halton to withdraw the comment he just made.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw, but it's true.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw that next comment he just made.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The exemptions we've provided are among several that are designed to help families. We adjusted the housing factor and we talked about feminine hygiene products, a range of children's clothing and other exemptions that we believe are the appropriate mix. I want to urge all members again that this package is about tax cuts for families, tax cuts for businesses—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Have you withdrawn the tax on truth serum?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw. It was just a question. I was just wondering about it.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We don't think creating jobs is a laughing matter, like the Conservatives. That's why the fair tax coalition has come out—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: This Jason Grier is one powerful fellow. Instead of the member for Toronto Centre, Premier, maybe you should make Jason Grier your Deputy Premier. At least it would be a bit more honest.

Let me ask the Premier directly again: You're trying to nail Ontario taxpayers with the biggest sales tax increase in the history of our province. Working families and retirees are going to pay more for gas for their car, heat for their homes—a $3-billion tax grab that is going to hurt families and kill jobs. Premier, if you truly believe that this greedy tax grab is in the best interests of Ontario families, show the courage of your convictions. Call for public hearings in Niagara Falls; call for public hearings in Peterborough, public hearings in London and North Bay. Take your case directly to the taxpayers, because I bet they'll laugh you out of the hall.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will withdraw the comment she just made.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I withdraw.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This from the leader of the party that had its last budget at Magna—talk about lack of public access. You know, I'd like the leader of the Conservative Party to tell us why their 2009 pre-budget submission said that the official opposition calls on this government to heed the call of the federal government and take immediate action to fix Ontario's competitive tax structure. We've done just that. Can you explain to me why Mr. Runciman said, the day we introduced the budget, "I think in theory our party is supportive of harmonization." That party has been all over the map. This province needs leadership. The Premier of Ontario is providing, and this government is providing, a tax package that will cut taxes for 93% of Ontarians. It will create 591,000 new jobs. This province is going to support this. This province knows that we need to create jobs and we need a more competitive—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Finance will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

New question.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, and I wonder if the Premier and the finance minister have the guts to try that circus act in full public hearings in Niagara Falls, in Peterborough and in North Bay.

Premier, you have ordered your Liberal caucus to shut down the public accounts committee hearings into your

billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle before the committee finished their investigation. Why are you ending the committee's work? What exactly, Premier, are you afraid of?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's up to the committee to make their own decisions in terms of what work they want to pursue and how much time they want to devote to that. I do want to thank them for the work that they have done.

I also want to relate back to the original work performed by the auditor and thank him, once again, for his good work. I thought he was nothing short of thorough. He made some specific findings and came up with some specific recommendations, and we adopt each and every one of those. He pointed out, in particular, a lack of oversight on the part of our government over activities that were unfolding over in eHealth and through Smart Systems. We accept that. We agree with that. We take responsibility for that. That's why we have put in place a number of specific changes to ensure that those kinds of activities are not repeated, and in particular, we are no longer going to allow sole-sourced contracts for our consultants.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier knows that Liberal Party fingerprints are all over the eHealth boondoggle, from former Liberal campaign chair John Ronson to your former adviser and adviser to the Deputy Premier, Karli Farrow. In an explosive revelation at committee, the former deputy minister, Ron Sapsford, told the committee that the Premier's senior health adviser, Sacha Bhatia, and his principal secretary, Jamison Steeve, had meetings with the CEO of eHealth, Sarah Kramer. Premier, since we don't get any answers from you, we need to ask Sarah Kramer directly about the contents of that meeting.

Premier, will you support the PC caucus motion to call Sarah Kramer for appearing at the public accounts committee, or are you trying to cover the trail that is now leading directly to the top advisers in the Premier's office?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, I won't. I will not support the continuing efforts of the official opposition to engage in games. I think that's counterproductive. I think it runs counter to the public interest, and it runs counter to the very specific finding made by the auditor. I want to draw the opposition's attention to this yet again. The auditor's report says, "We were aware of the allegations that 'party politics' may have entered into the awarding of contracts and that those awarding the contracts may have obtained a personal benefit from the firms getting the work—but we saw no evidence of this during our work."

No matter how many times I confront my honourable colleague with this finding of an independent auditor, he continues to reject that finding. Instead, he prefers to engage in political games. We won't participate in that. We'll continue to move forward and put in place an electronic health records system for all Ontarians.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't understand why the Premier is afraid of hearing directly from Sarah Kramer, his handpicked CEO at eHealth.

We all know that this billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle has so far resulted in the chair of eHealth, the CEO for eHealth, the deputy minister, and Ministers Caplan and Smitherman all losing their jobs. The only senior eHealth figure who has yet to lose his job is Premier McGuinty himself. And just when the committee found the direct links to his principal secretary, to his top health adviser, all of a sudden Dalton McGuinty now wants to cut off the committee hearings.

Premier, what ever happened to your commitment to transparency? What ever happened to your commitment to integrity? What ever happened to your commitment to watch out for the best interests of taxpayers? What happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in office? Will you call Sarah Kramer to that committee today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have a different approach and I think Ontarians can garner that on a day-to-day basis.

Rather than engaging in innuendo, I think Ontarians are looking for ideas, especially good ideas, and e-health is a good idea.

According to Canada Health Infoway, we are 95% to 100% complete on our client registry, on our diagnostic imaging systems, and on clinical reports of immunization. There is more work to be done, but we are making real progress. Since 2005, more than four million Ontarians now have electronic medical records in place. All of our hospitals have now gone filmless and are using digital diagnostic scans.

There were some problems, admittedly, at eHealth. They had to do with oversight. The auditor spoke to that in a very direct way.

Now we choose on behalf of Ontarians, in their interests, to move forward, and that's what we're doing.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. People across the province are worried—worried about their jobs, worried about their ability to pay their bills. The Premier says that a new tax on gas, on heating and on haircuts is going to make all that go away. Alberta-based economists may think that, but Ontarians struggling to get by during this recession absolutely do not.

My question is, when will the Premier start listening to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is right; there have been a number of economists who have spoken out in favour. There is a very strong consensus that it's time for us to do this kind of thing. One of those,

in particular, is Hugh Mackenzie, who's an economist. I think it's fair to say that he's on the left side of the political spectrum. This is what he said: "Ontario's 2009-10 budget establishes the right direction for the next few years. It provides substantial economic stimulus. It is consistent with the new orthodoxy that relies heavily on governments to help rebuild damaged economies. It imposes ... coherence on an incoherent federal plan. It increases support for low-income families and individuals. It modernizes Ontario's consumption tax."

I'd urge my honourable colleague to listen to an economist who is highly regarded on the left and, I'll also say, in connection with these comments, highly regarded by everyone.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier asked Ontarians for input on the last budget, but people's concerns about his tax plan are now falling on deaf ears—people like Lynn Eckert from Pickering, who writes this: "It is unfortunate that during these tough economic times ... middle-income families will have to battle another struggle just to make ends meet. Most of us have cut back as much as we thought possible just to keep our heads above water over the past couple of years and now we will have to ... make even more sacrifices for our families just to make our mortgage payments!" Why isn't the Premier listening to people like Lynn?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I look forward to the day when my honourable colleague stands in the House and says, "Did you know that 93% of Ontarians are going to get a permanent tax cut under the Liberal government's comprehensive package of tax reforms?" In addition to that fact, which my colleague omits, 90,000 people will no longer pay personal income tax in Ontario, and an average family with an $80,000 income will see a 10% tax cut. That means a family of four with an annual income of $25,000 will permanently save $1,040 every year.

We have worked hard to be fair and equitable and to ensure that families at the lower end of the income scale stand to benefit from this package of tax reforms, and I only wish that my honourable colleague would draw the public's attention to that from time to time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Lynn is not the only Ontarian being ignored by this Premier. Mark Marcon from Windsor writes, "I am opposed to the HST.... This is absolutely the worst time." Carla Baird from Kenora says, "I ... do not support the HST. The HST will cost all a lot more money for such things as home heating [and] gas." And Heather Barr from Ottawa adds this: "Don't you realize that many people just took salary cuts ... because of [the recession]? How do you think people have extra money to be able to cover this?"

How much longer will the Premier ignore Ontarians like Heather, Carla, Mark and Lynn?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to, through my honourable colleague, reassure all the individuals whose names she has put forward that we are in fact cutting their personal income taxes.

I also want to speak to those people and all Ontarians who understand intuitively that our world has changed. We need to do something to build a stronger Ontario and create more jobs. They're not looking for strong champions and defenders of the status quo, which they will find on that side of the House. What they are looking for are people who are prepared to lead them into a bright and promising future, where we can secure a bright future for our children.

One part of our plan has to do with modernizing and putting in place a competitive tax system. That's what our package of tax reforms is all about. More importantly than anything else, it's about creating 600,000 more jobs. We will do everything necessary to move forward with this package of tax reforms and get in place those 600,000 jobs for the people of Ontario.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There's a difference between new ideas and the really old, tired ones that the Premier continues to bring forward.

You know what? The Premier has a chance, though. He has a chance to show Lynn from Pickering and Mark from Windsor that he's at least willing to listen. The Premier can make sure that the committee that reviews the HST legislation travels across the province so that the people in Thunder Bay, Windsor, London, Ottawa and Kingston are heard. Will the Premier promise today, here and now, that the committee will visit communities across Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can promise a fulsome debate. I would say that it has been the subject of some considerable debate and conversation for at least seven months, and I expect it will occupy much of the interest of the public for months, if not years, to come.

What I would also draw to my honourable colleague's attention are some of the recommendations that came from the NDP Fair Tax Commission in 1991. Recommendation 58: Ontario should exempt all business inputs from the retail sales tax. Recommendation number 60: Ontario should harmonize—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Premier?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This pains them, but we must continue. Recommendation number 60 from the NDP Fair Tax Commission: Ontario should harmonize its retail sales tax with a national sales tax modelled on the federal goods and services tax.

Somewhere on the road to Damascus this leader lost her way. We have found our way. We are doing it the right way. We are going to create 600,000 jobs for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't know how digging up two-decade-old policy is new, but the Premier seems to think that it's all new. I have to say, in all seriousness—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Start the clock. Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It seems really clear from the Premier's response that he's not prepared to listen to the people of Ontario when it comes to their opinions about the HST. Since he's prepared to ignore them, I'm going to give him some more views from the people of Ontario that we've heard.

Tanya Clancy from Stratford says this: "It has been difficult enough the past couple of years with job losses in our home, just to keep the bills paid."

Dave and Laura Goodwin say this: "In this recession, the HST is going to devastate all the families already hard-hit by layoffs."

These are the voices of the people whom we represent in this chamber. Why won't the Premier at least hear them out and commit to HST hearings across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We obviously have heard those kinds of concerns, but there's another one that I would call upon my honourable colleague to listen to and try to find some way to answer. The question that is being put forward to us by Ontarians is quite simply this: What do we need to do to grow stronger? People understand that the old world is behind us and is not coming back. What they want to know is what we need to do to grow stronger, and that's going to involve some changes on our part.

This is not a time for champions of the status quo. It's time for us to find a way forward. One important way forward is for us to put in place a modern, competitive tax system. We've got to catch up to 130 other countries. We've got to catch up to four other provinces. It's time for us to take this step forward together and create 600,000 more jobs. If my colleague has a different plan to create 600,000 more jobs, we'd love to hear it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Listening to people isn't an old-world idea but ignoring them is. That's what this Premier is prepared to do. Until the Premier starts listening, I am going to keep raising the views of Ontarians in this chamber.

Russ Horner from Oshawa says this: "I doubt that any savings will be passed on. The same thing happened with the GST some time ago. Consumers got screwed as usual."

Christine Prokulevich from Sudbury says: "My husband hasn't worked in over four months, and additional costs that we'll have to pay due to the HST will have nothing but a negative impact on our family and home. We're struggling now."

Mrs. Hodges in Thunder Bay adds: "My husband and I live on a fixed income. There is no way we will be able to make do with the proposed HST tax."

Why is the Premier preventing Mrs. Hodges and other Ontarians like her from having a say?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I fully expect that my honourable colleague will do a very good job at making those kinds of representations day in and day out in the House. What I believe Ontarians are looking for are just a few more ideas on the part of the opposition. We have worked hard and, I would argue, well in government to come forward with a package of tax reforms that involve tax cuts for individuals, small businesses and our larger corporations and moving forward with the HST. We know that will create 600,000 more jobs.

The opposition says that they are against these reforms. What we don't know is what they are for. If they have a package of reforms that they can guarantee will create 600,000 more jobs during the course of the next 10 years, then we would love to hear that, but to this point in time we've heard no such ideas, no such proposals and no such policies. We have a solid idea. We're moving forward on behalf of Ontarians.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier of Ontario. Why are you blocking public consultations in Kingston, Cornwall, Belleville, Windsor, London, Thunder Bay and North Bay? Why are you blocking public consultation across Ontario on the HST?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will have the same public hearings we've had on other fall budget bills, and I will tell you they will be considerably more than that bunch had when they were the government. We announced this in March. Myself and my colleagues have had public meetings all over Ontario. I have had meetings in Windsor, London, Thunder Bay, Peterborough and Ottawa. The committee will have hearings as a result of this bill. They'll be the same as we've done on other fall bills.

We will take time to put out the full story: to tell people that they want to block an income tax cut, to tell senior citizens that they want to slow down property tax credits, to tell our business communities that they don't want them to have the most competitive taxes in North America.

We are behind this policy, as are Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Harper. We will continue to sell it. We will convince Ontarians and show them that this party, this government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If he believes his rhetoric on the HST, I've got an energy centre in Windsor to sell him.

He tells us he's going to create jobs; he doesn't. He tells us he won't raise taxes, then he does. Yesterday we had 150 Ontarians here who wanted to speak out against the HST. What do they have to show for it? Nothing, because you are going to block Ontarians, hundreds of thousands of them, who want to speak in their local community and have their voice heard. You're denying them that right. Are you afraid to face the public on this greedy $3-billion tax grab?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member and her party are going to vote against the broadest set of tax cuts for Ontarians ever presented. They may hide themselves in their rhetoric. They may want to ignore the advice of Jim Flaherty and Stephen Harper. They can ignore the advice of every major economist who's been talked to. They can wrap themselves in hyperbole; they can wrap themselves in false anger.

This government wants to create jobs. This government will create jobs. Unlike that member and her party, we're not content. We're not content to have unemployed auto workers in Windsor and St. Catharines. We're not content to see people lose their jobs in Brockville, North Bay and elsewhere. It's time for leadership, for courage, to listen to the experts, do what's right and create more than 600,000 new jobs. Stand up for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. If you're going to have some of these cross-debates, I'd very much encourage the honourable members to take them outside.

New question.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Michael Prue: To the minister responsible for the OLG: Can the minister explain how the Windsor Energy Centre could be budgeted at $40 million, end up costing the public $80 million, and now, if the forensic accountants are correct and to be believed, could be worth absolutely, and I quote them, "nothing"?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Minister?

1110

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are serious issues around the Windsor Energy Centre. Unlike the Conservative government, we are not going to close down Casino Windsor as a result of that, as Mr. Shurman indicated they would. Unlike the NDP, who voted against the initiative to create those jobs in Windsor, we are committed to ensuring the vitality and success of this enterprise.

We've taken a number of steps to deal with what transpired with respect to the Windsor Energy Centre. I would invite the member to look at OLG's statement of claim that was filed in court the other day, and I'd invite—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The government of Ontario tells families that these are tough times. They should get ready for emergency room closures, fired nurses and other cuts, but when they turn on the news, they learn their government spent $80 million to build a power plant that may literally be worth nothing.

CBC reports that the minister couldn't even find the valuation report. Why does the CBC have more information on the Windsor Energy Centre than the minister supposedly responsible for it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are, and have been, serious issues at the OLG, which is precisely why we have taken a number of the steps we have taken. There are questions on both sides of the issue.

Over the past five months, we have taken steps at the board level, at the senior executive level. We've put in a short-term operator at the Windsor Energy Centre to keep the lights on, and we've done a competitive RFP for a longer-term operator.

There's no doubt that the issues around the energy centre are troubling. We are committed to getting to the bottom of them. We are committed to defending the interests of taxpayers. That's what we've done to date. We will continue to do that, and we will continue to do it as part of our efforts to ensure that we create jobs and maintain jobs in the tourism industry, both in Windsor and across the province, with respect to gaming.

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Mr. Bruce Crozier: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. In my community of Windsor-Essex, health care continues to be a key concern for families. We're well aware that Ontario is in need of more doctors, and over the past several years, we've made great strides in training and recruiting more doctors, but I still hear on occasion from constituents who do not have access to a doctor. My constituents want to know that when they're sick, they have quick and easy access to a health care provider. Some residents have expressed concern that they live in communities that are not adequately reached by health care professionals, and I know this concern is echoed in some communities across the province.

What is the minister doing to train more doctors so more Ontarians have access to health care providers?

Hon. John Milloy: That was an excellent question raised by the member. I think all of us recognize the need to train more doctors here in the province of Ontario, and I'm very pleased that our government has taken the initiative and invested in more medical spots throughout the province.

One of the approaches that we've taken is to establish new medical education campuses, satellite campuses, in a number of communities across the province that do not have medical schools. I know the honourable member comes from the Windsor-Essex area, and one of those, in fact, involves the University of Windsor. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize those who are here today from the University of Windsor.

I'm pleased to report that, in partnership with the University of Western Ontario, the University of Windsor recently opened their doors to more medical students at the satellite campus. Last September, 28 new first-year students began their studies at the University of Windsor, and I think, as members know, studies have shown—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Everyone in Windsor-Essex county is excited to see the effects of the medical school on our community. Windsor has been in need of a boost in the medical sector, and I know it will do just that.

While a new medical school is important for the university, there are a number of other programs offered by the University of Windsor that are just as important. I understand that the university works very hard to improve its programming each and every year, and recently I was pleased to see the university call for tenders for the construction of the centre for engineering innovation. I believe that this will not only help attract students from outside the Windsor-Essex area, but it will also encourage more of those living within the area to attend the university.

Through you, Speaker, again I'm asking that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities share with this House how this government is helping to boost Windsor's ability to train and retain engineers by investing in the University of Windsor.

Hon. John Milloy: In 2007, the provincial government announced that we'd be investing $40 million to help the University of Windsor build the centre for engineering innovation, and I'm pleased to report that the federal government came to the table earlier this year through the knowledge infrastructure program. This 300,000-square-foot facility will focus on research and development and facilitate a direct connection between education, research and industrial innovation. The project is expected to create more than 1,600 jobs and have a total direct and indirect economic stimulus for Ontario and Canada of $270 million over three years.

I think all members recognize the importance of engineering as an area where Ontario needs to excel as we move forward to the jobs of the future, and I'm very proud that we could partner with the University of Windsor on this extremely important—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. Congratulations, Premier, you've made The National. The McGuinty Liberals' answers to questions about the Windsor Energy Centre simply raise more questions.

First, you begin construction of a casino expansion without any mention of needing additional power. You say it will cost $40 million to build the energy centre, then you spend $81 million to build the energy centre—just what we needed: more hot air from Windsor.

Now, media reports reveal that you are sitting on a report that says the $81-million project may be worth nothing. Perhaps we need a public inquiry on that.

What are you going to do about this Dwight elephant?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I can tell you we're not going to shut down Caesars Windsor the way that member wants to. As I've said to the member in the past, there is no doubt that there are challenges at the OLG, and this is one of the biggest.

Here is what we have done in the last five months. First of all, we've replaced the board and we're in the process of replacing the CEO. We have a short-term operator in place at the centre, we've done a competitive RFT and we are defending the lawsuit that the contractor has filed. I would invite the member and his colleagues to look at the rebuttal to the lawsuit to get a better sense of what the position of this government is.

What I can tell the member is that we remain committed to building the tourism sector across Ontario, especially in southwestern Ontario. We remain committed to keeping those facilities operating, and we will deal with this in an appropriate fashion over the next weeks and months. But make no mistake; we're—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Since the energy centre was built, indeed since pledging no more sole-sourced contracts, you awarded a $15,000-per-day sole-source deal to Angus Consulting, as you've just confirmed.

On October 30, the Premier said that breaking a promise to end sole-source deals was necessary because you had to keep the lights on at the Windsor casino. But the Cole valuation report says the energy centre is not about generating power, so this can't be about the lights. I've been telling you this for months while you dodged and took cover behind lawsuits and police investigations.

Why did you say you awarded the contract to keep the lights on when you did not?

1120

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We did let a short-term agreement go in order to—and I think the member forgot the other answer I gave him, that in fact the centre is providing heating and cooling to the facility.

I agree with him entirely: It is not an ideal situation. I don't like what has given rise to this situation. What we are trying to do now is unravel this and make sure that that centre is competitive, make sure that it continues to employ 2,300 people in the part of this country that has the highest unemployment and ensure that this sort of situation never happens again. That's what we're doing, those are the steps we've taken, and that's what we're going to continue to do, in spite of whatever they may say or want to say. We remain committed to the operation and we will unravel this mess in due course.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Finance. On October 28 in this House, you made a perplexing statement. You said that the implementation of the Arthurs recommendation to protect monthly pension benefits up to $2,500 would result in "a massive increase in what employees have to contribute in order to fund the PGBF."

Again I ask: Will the minister stand in this House and admit that (1) employees do not pay directly into the guaranteed fund; pension funds do, and that (2) nowhere

in the Arthurs report is it recommended that individual employees pay directly into the fund in the future?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Perhaps the member doesn't understand that if we increase the benefit, it's going to have to be paid for. Will the company write the cheque for the pension? Yes, but where is that money going to come from? It will have to be part of negotiations.

I know the member feels strongly about this, as do we. There are pension benefit guarantee funds in Ontario and the United States. Both of them are financially underwater. According to Mr. Arthurs's recommendation, we have engaged an outside actuary to give us an estimate of how much it would cost to provide that benefit and how it would be paid for. That will, I would say to my friend and colleague opposite, have a very meaningful and direct impact, potentially, on employment. Therefore, I think we have to look at this in the context of all the recommendations and work together to try to see what we can do in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Again on October 28, there was a perplexing statement made. In responding to a question as to why Ontario wasn't following Quebec's lead in helping safeguard the pensions of Nortel employees, he said, "What the government of Quebec is doing is exactly what we would do in the same circumstances.... It would not be appropriate to characterize it as doing anything different than Ontario is doing."

Will the minister now admit that the Ontario government has not followed the lead of the Quebec government in offering a helping hand to Nortel employees and has neither guaranteed the capital of Nortel employee pensions in Ontario nor agreed to hold off on a wind-up plan and give the assets five years to regain their value?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we did that last December, and that's precisely the point. The way the Quebec response has been characterized—it was, in fact, a change of policy for the government of Quebec. However, it reflects steps that we have already taken. I will undertake to provide the member opposite with a more detailed response to that.

We have an enormous challenge with respect to post-retirement income here in Ontario and across Canada. Premier McGuinty has led the fight to get this on the national radar and to have a full national discussion. That will take place next year at the Council of the Federation.

These are difficult issues. Ontario will continue to move forward. Within the next two weeks, I'll be bringing forward the first piece of serious pension reform legislation, and we'll have an opportunity to debate those ideas and those thoughts. In the interim, we will work with employers and employees to help protect those pensions that are threatened now.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Many seniors in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and across Ontario are living on fixed incomes. In these tough economic times, every cent counts.

Many seniors are hearing the fear tactics and scaremongering of those who choose to play politics with Ontario's future. What they haven't been told is that the HST is part of our comprehensive package that will see 93% of Ontarians receiving personal income tax cuts and also that 90,000 low-income Ontarians will no longer have to pay personal income tax. As well, low- and middle-income seniors will receive a permanent $260 sales tax credit, and the list goes on.

The Daily Bread Food Bank has been calling for more consideration of what the HST will mean for low-income Ontarians and those living on fixed incomes. Specifically, they were asking and looking for an exemption on prepared food under $4. What does this exemption mean for those on fixed incomes and businesses in my riding and in those ridings—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I thank my friend for the question. I want to say to seniors, and particularly those on fixed incomes, that starting in January we will be permanently reducing their income taxes and we'll be enhancing their tax credits in July.

What that means, and I would say with all due respect that is the whole story, is that it is vital that we pass our fall budget bill. We need to do that because we cannot provide some $10.6 billion worth of income tax relief for individuals over the next three years and some $4.5 billion worth of tax relief for our corporations over the next three years unless we get that bill passed.

There are some who are opposed to some $15 billion worth of income tax relief in the province of Ontario. On this side of the House, we know it's important, as we move forward with our tax modernization, that we get the piece about reducing income taxes into law as quickly as possible. That is what the seniors, particularly those on fixed incomes—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Brownell: Again to the Minister of Revenue: As we face the current global economic recession, one of the most pressing questions people face is, will they have a job or how can they find a job? No one chooses to struggle in supporting their families. However, we can support Ontario families by helping people get back to work.

Telus says that the HST will mean more investment in the province and more jobs. The Canadian Chemical Producers' Association says that the HST savings will help to preserve jobs in Ontario and allow companies to grow in the future. The Railway Association of Canada says that a single sales tax will save jobs. Jack Mintz estimates the HST will create over 590,000 jobs. Should Ontarians believe those who are playing politics with Ontario's economic future or should they believe in Canada's leading employers and economists?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say, with all due respect, there are those on one side of the political spectrum who

think that what we should do today is slash and burn. That is something they did to this province before. There are others who think that we should just increase taxes for everyone. But what we've said is that it's important for us to reform our tax system, to modernize it. What we need in the province more than anything else is more jobs—more people paying taxes to support our public services and fewer people who have to draw upon that pot for the common good. That is the route for us to restore Ontario to vibrant economic times. That will lead our tax reform to an increase of some 590,000 more jobs, $47 billion worth of more investment. On this side of the House, we're embracing a growing economy by reforming our tax system. On that side of the House, the twins of the status quo over there, status and quo—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Before I get to the question, I want to welcome all the members of the Police Association of Ontario here today and give my full support of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus.

Minister, you are responsible for the police services in this province, and of course, many of them are here today. You are aware that the director of the province's special investigations unit reports directly to your colleague the Attorney General. As the minister responsible for police, are you satisfied that the director of the SIU, Mr. Ian Scott, is performing his job in an objective and non-biased manner?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Obviously this is a very, very important issue. Let me say, on behalf of the people of Ontario, that we have every confidence in the structures that we've set up. We've set up structures to ensure that oversight is independent. We've set up structures to ensure that police officers and the public have equal rights of protection. We have set up a system whereby there can be no question about the integrity of our police officers in their actions.

Independent oversight is important. Independent oversight is good. I have to say that this is a government that clearly supports its police officers and the important work they do in the province.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, maybe you can begin by answering the question.

Minister, comments made by the director in an SIU press release of September 28 involving a police shooting incident in northern Ontario and more recently in a Toronto Star article of October 31 would indicate that the director sees fit to inject his personal opinion. His opinion casts a wide swath of doubt with respect to police in general.

The police community, both front-line and administrative, are outraged and believe that the director has lost his ability to remain objective and clearly has a bias against our police officers.

Minister, if the director oversees the actions of the police, who oversees the actions of the director? And what is being done to correct this abuse of the power of this office?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member knows full well that this minister or any other minister in this government cannot comment about individual cases.

But let me assure the people of Ontario, let me assure the police officers of Ontario, let me assure everyone in this chamber, that we value the work that our police officers do. We respect the work that our police officers do.

We will put the resources in to ensure that our police officers have the ability to do what they have to do in order to protect the people of Ontario. We will not be like previous governments and put half-measure programs in place that deter community safety rather than enhance it.

We are about community safety and our partners. We are proud of that partnership.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. All management and unionized staff at children's aid societies and children's mental health agencies across Ontario will be wearing blue ribbons on National Child Day on Friday. The blue ribbon indicates that the McGuinty government has failed children at risk, as the agencies that help them prepare their layoff notices and teeter on bankruptcy and outright closure.

On behalf of the children who depend on these vital agencies, I ask, will the Premier commit that no children's aid society will cut services, lay off staff or file for bankruptcy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance again to speak in this House on this critically important issue with respect to finding a pathway forward for the sustainability of children's aid societies. I have told this House before, it is our commitment to the kids that drives us to find a sustainable pathway forward for children's aid societies. Children's aid societies do some of the most important work, but they also must work in partnership in the communities in which they operate to make sure that we are able to put kids first and find the best outcomes for kids.

We are actively working right across the province with respect to the work being undertaken in our regional offices, to work line by line through budgets and to find a sustainable pathway forward. At the same time, we will be making some announcements shortly with respect to the individuals who will be on our commission to promote the sustainability of children's aid societies.

I look forward to working with our partners across the province to find—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The children of this province do not need another commission. They need their children's aid societies to be there for them when they need them. The only pathway this government is preparing is a pathway to bankruptcy and closure of children's aid societies.

Payukotayno James and Hudson Bay Family Services has issued layoff notices already; so has York Region CAS. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto faces a $1.4-million shortfall. Chatham-Kent children's aid society is preparing for bankruptcy as we speak. The children's aid society in Kenora can't meet the $600,000 monthly cost of protecting high-needs children and will soon be unable to make its payroll.

When management and unionized staff at these agencies sound their blue ribbon alert on Friday, what will this government do to ensure no layoffs, no services are cut, no closures at any—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: One of the things that we need to do is work within communities across the province. If the member opposite had an opportunity to talk to those who are out in communities, she would well know that this ministry is working at the regional level to manage cash flow, to work with agencies, to find that partnership.

Let's be clear on the facts in this case. Children's aid society funding has gone from $500 million to $1.4 billion in the last 10 years. That level of increase is not sustainable. We need to find a way to do better and we need to find a way to deliver more services and better outcomes to the kids.

I can tell you that every single day, my focus is on the children of this province, finding a way to deliver services to them and being open to the fact that we need to find a better and new pathway forward. The old way will not be the way of the future. We need to continue working with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

POLICE

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, police officers perform a vital role in our communities by working to ensure the safety of all Ontarians. Every day, police officers selflessly place themselves in dangerous situations without hesitation. It is because of the serious and often dangerous nature of the job and the importance of community safety that our government must ensure our police officers have the resources they need.

I know that today we have many esteemed representatives from police services across the province at Queen's Park to discuss issues of concern to their profession, including members from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I hope that our government continues to listen to them and give them the support they need to perform very important duties—namely, keeping our loved ones safe. Minister, how does this government support our police officers?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for the question and for his commitment to community safety. I'm proud that our government values the relationship with the police officers of Ontario. That relationship is very, very important because of their valuable input, their on-the-job experience and their sound advice. It's a partnership that is truly working.

Let's look back at the history since 2003, briefly: $93 million for our guns-and-gangs strategy. We just didn't have $93 million and we decided we'd put it somewhere; we listened to the police officers of Ontario, who told us, "That's a wise use of money." Then the police officers told us that we have to invest in the Toronto anti-violence intervention strategy, and so we invested $25 million. Why? Because they said it was important. Then they said it was very, very important that we invest in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I know that one of the concerns of our police services is that they have adequate funding in order to have enough officers in Ontario communities. Being able to increase the number of officers in our communities is one of the most important things we can do to ensure safer communities. Police officers play a number of important roles when it comes to reducing crime. Not only do they remove criminals from our streets, but the presence of officers is also a major deterrent. In many Ontario communities, the involvement of officers in community programs is a key factor in deterring at-risk youth from becoming involved in criminal activities.

Minister, given that increasing the number of police officers offers so many benefits, can you tell me what our government is doing to increase the number of police officers in our communities?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, another very, very important question. We, the government of the day, the government of Ontario, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, understand that it is very, very important that we put more police officers on the streets. So we have committed $68 million every year to put 2,000 new police officers on the streets.

One of the items on the Police Association of Ontario's agenda is that we lobby the federal government for the police officer recruitment fund, for them to live up to their commitment. I want every police officer here and those police officers across Ontario to understand that Premier McGuinty and this government will do all we can to ensure that the federal government lives up to that commitment to put more police officers on the streets of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Minister, with the introduction of the "support our troops" licence plate, which was initiated by my colleague from Simcoe North, Garfield

Dunlop, you waxed on about your support for our troops and the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces and your gratitude for the great work that they do. If the minister truly means what he says, then he will surely not continue to ignore the request of Lieutenant-Colonel Keith Rudderham, the commanding officer of CFB Petawawa—Ontario's largest military base. Lieutenant-Colonel Rudderham wrote you on August 31 on the issue of access to licensing services for the people on base Petawawa. To date, you haven't even shown him the courtesy of a reply. Why won't you respond to the base commander? Or are your words simply empty rhetoric?

1140

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me tell you, I think the yellow licence plates that we're issuing are in support of our troops. I'm very proud of the work that our troops do outside the country and inside the country, and anything that we can do to acknowledge their contributions—that's exactly what we are doing by issuing these yellow plates.

We have worked very closely with the Canadian Armed Forces, and they're very pleased with the arrangement that we have come up with. This is not a political issue; this is an issue that is right for the forces. It will help them to move forward with some of the assistance they can provide to the armed forces personnel.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I wrote to you and had it hand-delivered to you on October 13, supporting the lieutenant-colonel in their request for an urgent meeting so that they could make their point to you about the importance of licence services to the over 11,000 personnel and family members who live and work on base Petawawa. You have not even shown me the courtesy of a reply in a month—no reply.

Talk is cheap, Minister. Talk is cheap. You stand up in this House and talk about how you support our troops and their families and the great work they do, but you don't even acknowledge the fact that they've written you. That is shameful. That is, I dare say, nothing but hypocrisy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Stand up for our troops.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We are standing up for our troops; you are not.

The changes we are making actually are going to improve the public service in this province, and I'm very proud of those changes. In fact, right now, we're offering only the driver licences and the car licences in certain locations, but going forward, we will offer to the public a package of services which will include the health care card services as well. There will be 300 locations. It will consist of both the private offices and the government offices. It strikes a good combination to provide the services that we need in this province, and they are very well being accepted by the public as we move forward.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question for the Minister of Transportation: Recent articles in the Toronto Star have shown that hundreds of Ontario drivers are being shafted by Highway 407 toll collectors. Out of the blue, drivers are receiving poorly documented bills for long-passed travel with thousands of dollars of added interest charges. Bills are being sent to people who are deceased, people who have not owned a car for years, people who are living

Hon. James J. Bradley: Unfortunately—that's a good line; I'll give him that—as you may know, first of all, your government was involved in the privatization of Highway 407—step number one. Step number two, this government completely sold it, and they wrote rules into the agreement with 407 that allows 407 to do almost whatever it wants.

I share the member's concerns about some of the tactics that are being used. But of course, our government went to court to defend the very people you are talking about. Unfortunately, the courts ruled against us and in favour of the corporation that runs Highway 407 because they signed a very, very lucrative deal with the Conservative government that preceded us in office.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Government Services, in not answering my question, accused me of not supporting our troops. Now—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I would just say that if the honourable member is dissatisfied with an answer, he has the ability, as I am about to read, to file a late show for clarification.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38a, the member for Nepean–Carleton has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Finance concerning public consultations on the HST legislation. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38a, the member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance concerning the Windsor Energy Centre. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38a, the member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services concerning the SIU and the oversight of the director. This matter will be debated at 3 p.m. today.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): At 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a number of deferred votes.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to the amendment to the government notice of motion number 142 by the member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hillier, Randy	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Orazietti, David
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Ruprecht, Tony
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Brownell, Jim	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Naqvi, Yasir	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 24; the nays are 61.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

We have a deferred vote on the amendment to government notice of motion 142 by the member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1159.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gélinas, France	Murdoch, Bill
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Prue, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Runciman, Robert W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 24; the nays are 64.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the amendment lost.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 142.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1203 to 1208.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gélinas, France	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	
Hillier, Randy	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 31.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to government notice of motion number 141 by the member for Halton.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1212 to 1217.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members please take their seats.

All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Martiniuk, Gerry	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hillier, Randy	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 23; the nays are 64.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the amendment lost.

We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 141.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1220 to 1225.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion 141. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chan, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hillier, Randy	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 30.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1229 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm very pleased to welcome two groups from York South–Weston here today. Welcome to Guidance of Canadian Somali Youth; and from York Memorial high school, welcome to the students and their teachers. Both groups are here to enjoy a tour of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Harry Danford, the former member from the riding of Hastings–Peterborough in the 36th Parliament. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I wanted to introduce some special guests we have here from the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. The president of the association, Mr. James Kang, is here. I don't have all the business cards

from the other representatives, but a number of the executive officers are here as well from the association. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NEUSTADT SEWAGE LAGOON

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I rise in the House today to recognize the good work of the Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of the Environment, who has laid to rest years of fighting over the Neustadt sewage lagoon. Unlike his predecessor, Laurel Broten, Minister Gerretsen got the job done.

The former minister, Minister Broten, was at times inept at her job, but most of the time she just bullied and refused to help, once going as far as to encourage the municipality of West Grey to sue if they didn't agree with her orders.

Unfortunately, the same can be said of the Ministry of Natural Resources, whose minister failed to protect the Saugeen River when he refused to recognize that rivers were under his ministry's mandate.

For all these years, the municipality and I fought these ministries, trying to prove to their ministers that it was their job to fix the lagoon and their job to pay for the $2.5-million project to prevent a sewage spill into the river. Without the erosion control, there was grave concern that the lagoons would be breached and cause an environmental disaster for communities and waterways downstream to Lake Huron. In the end, a federal-provincial COMRIF grant covered their share of the tab, and Minister Gerretsen helped the local municipality cover part of their share.

The lagoon site is now a beautiful park space. So, thank you, Minister Gerretsen, for getting the job done, and thank you to the municipality of West Grey for hanging in there all these years.

BRIAN COCHRANE

Mr. Paul Miller: On behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party, I wish to pay tribute to the life of Brian Cochrane, past president of CUPE Local 416, who passed away last weekend. It is always a difficult thing, affecting more than family, when someone who has dedicated their life to a cause passes away.

Brian Cochrane was the first president of CUPE Local 416, which was created when the city of Toronto was amalgamated. Prior to amalgamation, he represented workers in the former city of North York.

As anyone who has had to work through an amalgamation knows, it is very difficult and all these years later still not complete in Toronto. Navigating through the bureaucracies that were trying to find their place was to understand the internal workings of seven municipalities—not an easy task for even the most experienced bureaucrat.

Brian Cochrane was a strong leader for his outside workers through this extremely difficult period and through an equally difficult strike in 2002. My caucus was proud to work with Mr. Cochrane to hammer out the details of the back-to-work legislation, ensuring the fairest deal possible for his members.

Brian Cochrane will be remembered as a strong and dedicated labour leader, who was lost to us much too soon.

On behalf of the NDP, I extend our condolences to Brian's family and his union brothers and sisters.

WINTER FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Mr. Kim Craitor: The Christmas spirit was in the air in my riding of Niagara Falls with the 27th annual opening of the Niagara Winter Festival of Lights. On hand were Minnie and Mickey Mouse as well as Daisy Duck, live from Walt Disney, to help officially launch this spectacular event.

Proudly, this festival is Canada's largest and the premier light festival in North America. This is due in large part to the hard work of Dino Fazio, his hard-working staff and the numerous volunteers who pour their hearts and souls into ensuring that visiting families have a great experience.

Over 1.3 million visitors are attracted to this festival, which boasts over 120 animated displays, including the famous Enchantment of Disney displays and the ever-popular Zimmermann light fountain display.

The festival also includes a calendar of festive events, including concerts by Loretta Lynn, the Gatlin Brothers and Ronnie Prophet; weekly fireworks performances; and Canada's largest outdoor New Year's Eve party.

This year, the festival includes Rink at the Brink, an outdoor ice rink that will offer public ice-skating right at the brink of the Horseshoe Falls. This spectacular setting will offer breathtaking views and a magical outdoor Niagara Falls ice-skating experience.

For a thrill of a lifetime, I urge everyone, including all my colleagues on both sides of the House, to skate at the Rink at the Brink and enjoy Niagara's spectacular Winter Festival of Lights together with their families in Niagara Falls. Have a great time.

CANADIAN YOUTH BUSINESS FOUNDATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: Last night, I was pleased to attend the Chairman's Awards Celebration at the Canadian Youth Business Foundation Youth Entrepreneurship Summit. The CYBF is a national charity dedicated to championing tomorrow's entrepreneurial nation-builders. They point out that this is particularly important, as 71% of small business owners will retire within 10 years, with 41% retiring within the next five years.

CYBF invests time and money in aspiring young entrepreneurs aged 18 to 34 who have a great business

idea but find it difficult to obtain financing or mentoring through traditional sources.

I was very inspired last night seeing the confidence of the many young entrepreneurs I met, along with their mentors and supporters. These young Canadians are our future. They are the ones who will be creating the jobs and prosperity Canada needs. What we must do as legislators is help them create Ontario's wealth by cutting taxes, red tape and regulations. Government cannot create prosperity; only healthy businesses and entrepreneurs can do that. The young men and women I met last night will help build prosperity. Government just needs to get out of their way.

BRAMPTON BOARD OF TRADE SANTA CLAUS PARADE

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: There is nothing more magical than Santa Claus to the hearts of many children and their families. Being part of putting that special smile on the faces of literally thousands of children is one of the nicest feelings.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the nighttime version of the Brampton Board of Trade Santa Claus parade. On Saturday, November 21, around 5 p.m., the parade will start along its route, past children of all ages who will have been lining the route for hours.

The modern-day Brampton Board of Trade Santa Claus parade was revived in 1986, and in 1995 the parade became one of the first of its kind to be a nighttime event. Annual attendance is estimated to top over 150,000 people, and we in Brampton believe that makes it the highest-attended nighttime parade in the province, and possibly in Canada.

The parade consists of over 40 floats, 12 bands and 200 costumed characters, as well as hundreds of volunteers lighting Santa's route through downtown Brampton. As this is the 15th anniversary, we expect it will be the best community parade ever. There are many along the parade route who believe that Santa's arrival begins at the North Pole and is planned by elves, but in reality all great events and activities begin with an idea and are carried out by dedicated organizing committees, a group of incredible volunteers who meet year-round to organize and plan this magical evening of entertainment.

The success of the Brampton Board of Trade Santa Claus parade would not be possible if it were not for the generous financial, material and advertising support of the sponsors. Please join me in recognizing and thanking the hundreds of volunteers, including my staff, like Barbara Tait, who donate their time and efforts for the children of Brampton.

1510

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: First, I would like to recognize the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. Thank you for being here today as we debate the issue of the HST.

This government proved the harmonized sales tax is indeed a bad idea when it announced last week that it would remove the tax from food and beverages under $4, saving taxpayers almost $400,000 for this simple expense. If this tax is wrong for coffee and muffins, it's equally wrong for home heating, electricity, exercise classes, kids' recreation, physiotherapy, cable television, Internet services and 8% more for almost everything we purchase.

The citizens of Ontario can't be bribed with a tax-free coffee and a muffin. Ontario knows the truth about the HST: It's simply a $3-billion tax grab from the people of Ontario. The National Citizens Coalition estimates the tax will cost the average citizen—listen up—$800 to $1,000 per year. That's the truth of this tax.

I urge the government to listen to the wisdom of the people of Ontario. It's time to go beyond chopping the tax on coffee and muffins; it's time to simply halt this tax. In this climate of small business, they are the first customers of the people of Ontario. They are the interface with the taxpayers of Ontario. They're going to be tax collectors for the province of Ontario. It's shameful. You people should be ashamed of what you're doing.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Dave Levac: In Ontario, there are 19,000 volunteer firefighters and over 200 part-time firefighters, along with 46 fire investigators on active duty today. All of the firefighters of Ontario deserve our gratitude and support for the work they do day in and day out. They risk it all, even their health and their lives, to keep our health and lives safe.

On November 5, in the riding of Brant, I was honoured to join the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Peter Fonseca, along with my colleague Leeanna Pendergast, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, to announce that our province's volunteer and part-time firefighters, along with fire inspectors, will be covered by our progressive presumptive legislation. It's been an honour to work with all of the stakeholders to achieve this important coverage. The support from all sectors, stakeholders and colleagues from all sides of the House is a testimony to our collective respect and understanding of the dangers that firefighters face every single day.

This historic coverage was announced in Paris, Ontario, where over 100 years ago the very first firefighters' organization was founded and formed. I said on the 5th, and I say it now: These great firefighters, and especially their families, can rest just a little easier as of today, thanks to Bill Burns, the president of the FFAO, and Dave Thompson, the past president, and all of the stakeholders inside of the firefighters. We salute you and thank you for dedicating your lives to firefighting.

TAXATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: Ontario seniors have heard too much opposition bafflegab about the province's tax

reforms. The opposition may oppose 600,000 new jobs and tax cuts for seniors, but seniors themselves kind of like the idea.

In 2010, provincial income tax for seniors will go down permanently. The senior homeowners' property tax credit will double—permanently—from $250 per year to $500 per year. Each senior will receive a refundable sales tax credit of about $260 a year, permanently. To ease the transition to a harmonized sales tax in Ontario, single seniors will receive $300 and families $1,000, paid in three instalments. Next year, those credits will pay all the HST on more than $18,000 worth of purchases that may not be taxable today.

Empty-nesters who sell their homes will find that the HST is not applied to the sale of existing homes. For new homes, the first $400,000 of the price of a home is free of PST, and that covers more than 75% of all Ontario homes.

Seniors want their children and grandchildren to have the same opportunity to get—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ONTARIO KOREAN BUSINESSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to recognize the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. It was established in 1973 and it now serves 2,500 small business owners. It's a registered non-profit organization, and it provides membership services as well as group purchases. Its estimated annual sales volume is about $2 billion a year.

Within its membership, 75% of its members—that's almost 1,900—are convenience store owners. These establishments represent approximately 25% of all convenience stores in Ontario. There are 21 regional chapters scattered across Ontario. These stores are open long hours, seven days a week. Profit margins are small. Ninety per cent of the stores are operated by families. This is their entire livelihood.

Koreans started getting involved in convenience store operations in the late 1960s, as they started to migrate to Ontario. The stores have become the grassroots of the Korean community ever since, and the OKBA is a symbol within the Korean community. They employ 10,000 people across Ontario, and they're responsible for the livelihoods of 30,000 family members.

There are one or more Korean stores on almost every corner in our large cities in Ontario. Convenience stores are the centre of their community geographically, politically and socially. We welcome the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association here today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne le rendement des élèves, la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1517 to 1522.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Qaadri has moved the adoption of the Standing Committee on Social Policy report regarding Bill 177. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill
Arthurs, Wayne	Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Johnson, Rick	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Leal, Jeff	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, Dave	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Opposed?

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Dunlop, Garfield	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
DiNovo, Cheri	O'Toole, John	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 36; the nays are 14.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 196, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of Barrie and the Town of

Innisfil / Projet de loi 196, Loi concernant la modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de Barrie et la ville d'Innisfil.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1525 to 1530.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil
Arthurs, Wayne	Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Johnson, Rick	Ruprecht, Tony
Carroll, Aileen	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Leal, Jeff	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, Dave	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Dunlop, Garfield	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Martiniuk, Gerry	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
DiNovo, Cheri	O'Toole, John	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 39; the nays are 17.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the report adopted.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Sergio assumes ballot item number 54 and Mr. Dhillon assumes ballot item number 63.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to ask all members to join me in welcoming a delegation from China, the census and statistics delegation, led by Mr. Li Tianyuan and his guests, located in the west gallery. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EHEALTH ONTARIO SPENDING ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'OBLIGATION DE RENDRE COMPTE DES DÉPENSES DE CYBERSANTÉ ONTARIO

Mr. Chudleigh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 220, An Act to provide for a public inquiry to discover the truth about Ontario's Electronic Health Records Initiative / Projet de loi 220, Loi prévoyant la tenue d'une enquête publique pour découvrir la vérité concernant L'Initiative des dossiers de santé électroniques de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The bill requires the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish a commission to inquire into the report on the spending relating to Ontario's electronic health records initiative and to make recommendations directed to the avoidance of unaccountable spending in other agencies in similar circumstances relating to Ontario's electronic health records initiative. The commission has the powers of a commission under a public inquiry. Once the inquiry begins, the commission must make an interim report in six months and a final report in 12 months.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Today I rise to pay tribute to the Police Association of Ontario and its members as they join us for their 11th annual legislative day here at Queen's Park. I would especially like to acknowledge the Police Association of Ontario's president, Larry Molyneaux, and chief administrative officer Ron Middel. Their leadership is impressive, and I can say first-hand that they are certainly effective in their roles.

The Police Association of Ontario is here today to meet with members from all three parties to discuss issues important to their organization. As members of the House know, the Police Association of Ontario is the official voice of Ontario's front-line police personnel. More than 33,000 police officers and civilians serving in police services throughout Ontario make up its member-

ship. These are the people who put their lives on the line, day in and day out, to ensure our province remains safe, secure and prosperous.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the members of the Police Association of Ontario for all they do for our communities. They work with passion and commitment, not only as police officers upholding the law but also as coaches and mentors, helping to guide our young people and working to build a stronger Ontario. PAO lobby day gives members of the Legislature, on behalf of the people of Ontario, the opportunity to say thank you.

On a personal level, I am grateful for the collaborative efforts our government has enjoyed with the Police Association of Ontario, which has been key in helping us shape and execute community safety initiatives. This past September, I had the honour of introducing in this House Bill 203, the Interprovincial Policing Act, 2009. That proposed legislation, if passed, would make it easier for police to carry on their investigations in Canada across provincial and territorial borders. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the PAO and its leadership for their support and their contribution as we developed a legislative proposal on cross-border policing.

In addition to their work on the provincial cross-border policing legislation, we continue to benefit from the contributions of the PAO in a variety of ways. The Police Association of Ontario provides valuable assistance and advice to me and to my ministry on an ongoing basis as a member of the policing standards advisory committee. Their participation as members in this committee gives us the valuable perspective of active-duty police officers in our policy deliberations. Their valuable input has also been critical in helping us develop and execute initiatives such as the Safer Communities—1,000 Officers and the community policing partnership program. Our police partners' advice was key as we allocated approximately $30 million annually for five years through the federal police officers recruitment fund to hire more than 300 officers.

This government stands beside our policing partners as we continue to lobby the federal government to make the funding for this program permanent and to provide Ontario with its fair share of the promised 2,500 police officers.

Police officers are a valuable and essential component of our communities. They pound the pavement on our streets, they patrol our neighbourhoods and they respond to our calls of distress. The McGuinty government is grateful for the hard work, honest feedback and healthy dialogue we have been able to maintain with the Police Association of Ontario. We will continue to do our part to ensure that our partnership continues to thrive.

Today, I am pleased to salute the dedicated and hard-working people who make up the Police Association of Ontario. I am confident that all members of this House will join me in expressing our sincerest thanks to the PAO and its membership for helping us make Ontario a stronger and safer place in which to live, work and play.

1540

AFFORDABLE HOUSING
LOGEMENTS ABORDABLES

Hon. Jim Watson: This Sunday, November 22, National Housing Day will be celebrated across Ontario, and in fact across Canada. It's a day that gives us an opportunity to recognize the combined efforts of many dedicated individuals and organizations that are working together to advance affordable housing solutions.

Here in Ontario, our government continues to improve access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing. Last June, our government signed a new affordable housing agreement with the federal government to deliver a range of new housing to the people of Ontario. In total, our government is investing $622 million to match the same amount that the federal government is contributing. That's a combined $1.2 billion in new funding for affordable housing, something I think we can all be very, very proud of. In fact, that is a record amount of money for that period of time in the history of Ontario.

This program focuses on improving the health and safety of residents living in social housing communities and works to provide enhanced accessibility for seniors of low income and persons with disabilities. This program is for people like Larry, in Kingston—Larry, who has been homeless for most of his adult life due to a battle with mental illness and addiction, has finally found a safe refuge for his final years in one of our supportive housing projects—and for people like Delphine, who lost the use of her legs. She now uses an electric scooter to get around in her accessible and affordable home.

Ce programme vise aussi des gens comme Delphine, qui a perdu l'usage de ses jambes. Elle utilise maintenant un triporteur pour se déplacer dans son logement accessible et abordable.

In total, with this $1.2 billion in new funding, we will be renovating 50,000 social housing units and building 4,500 new affordable housing units. I know the member from Cambridge is interested in this figure because some of those projects will go into his riding.

Many of those social housing units we are repairing were no longer liveable. By investing in the renovation, we are helping to reduce the housing shortage in Ontario. We know in Toronto, for instance, there was a story that showed that 50 to 250 units were uninhabitable because of the poor condition they were in. This will bring these units back on to the inventory, and we're providing a better, safer home for an Ontario family.

We've also moved forward with other housing initiatives.

Nous avons consulté des groupes autochtones et avons convenu de la façon la plus efficace de répartir 80 $ millions pour des initiatives de logement qui profiteront aux ménages autochtones hors-réserve.

We've consulted with aboriginal groups and agreed on the most effective way to distribute $80 million in housing initiatives that will benefit off-reserve aboriginal households.

In Toronto, Miziwe Biik Development Corp. is administering a $20-million program that will help approximately 320 aboriginal households. In the rest of the province, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Support Services, or OAHSS, is administering a $60-million program that will support some 560 aboriginal households outside of the greater Toronto area.

One of the most important initiatives during the last year has been our efforts to create a long-term affordable housing strategy. It was an initiative the McGuinty government campaigned on in the 2007 campaign, that we would put together for the first time a long-term affordable housing strategy for our province.

This strategy is being developed together with the people of Ontario, our community partners, municipalities, the not-for-profit sector and the private sector. I had the personal pleasure of attending a number of these affordable housing sessions, not held in fancy hotels or banquet halls but actually in community centres and not-for-profit housing communities themselves, and I was very impressed with the depth of the discussions and the quality of the ideas offered. In fact, we were so overwhelmed that in my community of Ottawa we actually had to get a tent put up in the parking lot because so many people wanted to come and offer their opinion.

Mr. Jeff Leal: A big tent.

Hon. Jim Watson: A big tent, at Our Lady of Fatima Church.

We received a number of positive comments from the consultations, including from Yutaka Dirks of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, or ACTO, who said, "Well, I thought ... it was really quite positive. The room was packed, which we're always happy to see, and there was good attendance of people there who were actually tenants ... that's where this long-term affordable housing strategy has to come from." We want everyone to have sufficient opportunity to inform and participate in the development of this important initiative and create a common vision for affordable housing.

Nous voulons que tout le monde ait la possibilité de bien participer à l'élaboration de cette importante initiative et de créer une vision commune pour le logement abordable dans toute la province de l'Ontario.

The response to our province-wide consultations was, in fact, overwhelming. More than 1,000 people came out and participated in the consultations.

I want to thank those members of provincial Parliament who took the time to hold their own consultations above and beyond the 13 consultations. I know my colleague from Peterborough had one, and my parliamentary assistant. A number of MPPs hosted these one-on-one consultations in North Bay and so on, and I thank them very much, because that information will then be fed into the consultation process.

We will continue to provide opportunities for the public, stakeholders and our municipal partners to participate in the consultation process until the end of the year. In fact, right now we're holding a series of bilateral discussions with groups that have expertise in housing. Whether it's Habitat for Humanity or the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association or the home builders, all of these groups are meeting with us. We had two of those meetings two weeks ago. I attended the ONPHA annual general meeting in Toronto just on the weekend. All of these ideas and suggestions will be considered carefully as we develop our long-term affordable housing strategy for Ontario.

As we heard in the poverty reduction consultations, affordable housing has a direct and positive impact on Ontarians' health, their education, their personal wealth and certainly their well-being. It plays a crucial role in addressing poverty and in providing families with a decent standard of living. That is why our government remains committed to improving affordable housing in Ontario. We're proud of the $1.2 billion—which is not crumbs. It's not meagre. It is a significant amount of money, the largest amount that's been spent in that short a period of time in Ontario's history.

We look forward to developing the long-term affordable housing strategy and releasing it for the public to view, to see the benchmarks that we set for ourselves on a go-forward basis. We would encourage the federal government to join with us in developing a national long-term affordable housing strategy, because we're the only country in the G8 that does not have a national affordable housing strategy. We look forward, as provincial and territorial housing ministers, to meeting with the federal minister, Minister Finley, early in December. This is a commitment that she made to us, and we look forward to pushing her to continue what we consider to be good work that's been established by the renewal of the affordable housing program for five years. We'd like to see that, obviously, for 10 years and we'd like to see commitments for a national housing strategy to join with us at the provincial, municipal and territorial levels. We're looking forward to celebrating National Housing Day in this country.

I hope members have a chance to go and visit some of the housing projects that this government has funded through tax dollars. I thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm happy to comment on the housing investments in the province of Ontario.

This is both a good-news and a bad-news story. Let me just begin by recapping a little: In their 2003 platform the McGuinty Liberals committed to "match federal support to create almost 20,000 new housing units for needy Ontario families." In April 2005, the McGuinty Liberal government signed a federal-provincial agreement and committed themselves to a total investment of more than $734 million, including funding from the federal and municipal partners.

1550

I just want to remind the member opposite that on December 6, 2002, it was the PC government that originally announced this investment.

To date, only 10,002 affordable rental and supportive housing units have been built—that's approximately half of what was promised—or are in the process of being developed. This represents less than 2,000 units per year, whereas the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's Where's Home? 2008 report estimates that the annual need for purpose-built additional rental housing is approximately 10,000 units per year—a big shortfall.

It should therefore be no surprise that wait lists are growing much faster than units are being built. At the beginning of 2009, there were 129,253 households on the municipal waiting lists for assisted housing. I should mention that these figures do not account for those households which have either given up without solving their housing problem, or never actually registered because they were discouraged by these long, long wait lists. Peel region, for example, has up to a 21-year wait list for singles and families.

Among 43 of the service managers, an average of 72% of households on the waiting lists had annual incomes below $20,000, meaning they could afford a monthly rent of no more than $500.

This is a serious issue, and I have great concern that the problem will only escalate with the implementation of the McGuinty Liberals' HST.

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very, very pleased this afternoon to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on the Police Association of Ontario's annual lobby day.

I was very, very pleased yesterday afternoon to attend a speech made by our new leader, Tim Hudak, to the PAO. He made a lot of comments, but certainly some of the issues he pointed out as important were the use of tasers and our support for that program; the 2,500 officers from the federal government, and how we hope to work with the federal government as well to continue that program; the serious issues around the special investigations units—and I asked a question today about that; and some of the legislation that the police association and police services are looking at.

I think what's important is our support for the community, our support for the police across this province.

I want to just give you a quick story on just why it's so important to have good, solid, well-trained police officers who care about our communities. A couple of weeks back, a young boy at James Keating Elementary School collapsed in the playground area outside the school. I think he was almost pronounced dead. They called 911, and within 90 seconds two police officers arrived on the scene. Provincial constables Peter Hunter and Robin Chiasson revived this young lad; they had the use of a defibrillator. He's now recovering in hospital from some health issues. The reality is that they were there at the exact moment and saved this boy's life, and they will be rewarded for that sometime in the future.

That is what I think we're all about in this provincial Parliament. When we talk about protecting our police officers, we need to know that they're protecting our communities and therefore us.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank those young officers for a job well done, and I want to thank my friend, the communications director for the southern Georgian Bay regional department, David Hobson, for a job well done in reporting this to me and making sure that people in the Legislature know about some of the great young police officers we have in the province of Ontario.

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I too, on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the New Democratic Party of Ontario, would like to welcome the police who are here today from across Ontario with the Police Association of Ontario to talk to us about the issues that are affecting them on the front line.

It is clear they're coming here and asking for three or four things. One of them is funding, and I think we need to hear seriously what the police are telling us. At this time of economic depression, at this time when people more and more are having to turn to the social service system for assistance, far too often you find that you can't get those services when you get to the agencies. Far too often in communities across Ontario, the police are the last line. They're the ones who are dealing with the suicide attempts. They're the ones who are dealing with the issues having to do with family violence. They're the ones who are having to deal with many of the symptoms that come out of such things as we have now in a recession. I think it's important that we hear what police officers are telling us and that we provide them with the finances necessary for them to do the job that we're asking them to do. We know that every day they put their jobs on the line—not their job but their life. We in the New Democratic Party of Ontario want to thank them for the work they do, but also we want to support them by making sure they get what they need to do their jobs adequately.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I am responding to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Here are the facts. These are the facts about this McGuinty government's spending on housing. These are not our facts; these come from the Housing Network of Ontario, the one that Yutaka sits on. The McGuinty government has, in fact, slashed the housing budget, making a big 7% cut, $52.1 million, to spending.

"Over the past four years, MAH has seen its annual operating funding cut by $222.4 million (that's almost a quarter of a billion dollars)—adding up to a painfully deep 24% cut since fiscal 2005. Over the past four years, the cumulative spending cuts at MAH add up to $657.1 million." That would have built 4,380 new affordable homes.

"According to the government's official spending estimates, the biggest cuts at the MAH this year will be in the affordable housing program—$38.9 million" cut from that program. "In particular, the social housing program—which assists some of the poorest households—will take almost all of the spending cuts....

"Government officials say that the massive operating funding cuts at MAH are offset by one-time spending including $100 million in fiscal 2007 ... and $585.3 million.... But those one-time initiatives were supposed to supplement" the regular funding instead of replacing it. If the Ontario government had maintained their spending at $926 million—the 2005 spending rate—"over the past four years, there would be a cumulative total of $657.1 million more than the actual amount spent" by this government. That's how much money they've cut from affordable housing.

Almost 30,000 households are waiting for affordable housing on a list that lasts 10 to 20 years—that's the average wait time—70,000 households in the GTA alone. We have thousands dying on the streets across the country and thousands on the streets in Toronto and across Ontario. This is the national disaster. It costs, in fact, more to keep somebody homeless than it does to provide them with a home, so it's a false economy as well.

Here's what the government could do. They could do it, and they should do it. It's a moral and ethical imperative. Pass these four initiatives. All four have been put forward by the New Democratic Party.

(1) Inclusionary zoning: Bill 198 wouldn't cost a tax dollar and would provide, by our estimations, about 12,000 new housing units a year.

(2) Pass housing as a human right. This is in line with the UN mandate. This province is not in line with the UN mandate.

(3) Build what they promised in 2003. They promised, in 2003, 20,000 new units built. They have not done so.

(4) Finally, what all the anti-poverty activists are asking for, what our friends from the Daily Bread Food Bank are asking for: a housing credit for those on social assistance.

Those four items have been put forward by every housing consultation group across this province. Do it, we say in the New Democratic Party. Do it.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have many more—hundreds of these coming in every day—petitions against the HST.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for ... funeral services, gym memberships"—we have "newspapers" here, but I guess the Toronto Star looked after that one for the Liberals—"and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I have signed this and will give it to Iman.

SALE OF DOMESTIC WINES AND BEERS

Mr. David Zimmer: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by 599 convenience store owners. It says:

"Whereas the province of Ontario restricts the sale of beer and wine to the LCBO, a few winery retail stores and the Beer Store, and the three large beer companies are owned by multinationals;

"Whereas other provinces (notably Quebec) have been selling beer and wine in local convenience stores for many years without any harm to the well-being of the public;

"Whereas it is desirable to promote the sale of beer and wine in a convenient manner consistent with a contemporary society;

"Whereas it is essential to support local convenience stores for the survival of small businesses;

"Whereas it is obvious from the current market trends that the sales of wine and beer in convenience stores is not a question of 'if' but 'when';

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Liquor Control Act to permit the sale of beer and wine in local convenience stores to the public throughout the province and to do it now."

YOUTH ACTION ALLIANCE

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Health Promotion is planning on cancelling funding for the Youth Action Alliance program without looking at its effectiveness in rural Ontario; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance has mobilized youth in the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound area around health issues of importance, including the dangers of smoking, second-hand smoke and illegal cigarettes; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance program is an opportunity for youth in the area to build leadership skills and make valuable contributions to their communities;

"We, the undersigned, ask the Minister of Health Promotion to look at each Youth Action Alliance program on an individual basis and see if it is working effectively and making a difference in its local community; and

"To continue funding those that are working effectively."

I will send it with Cairistonia. I guess that's the best I can do on that one, but I'll leave it up to you, Mr. Speaker, to sort that out. I've signed it, also.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received petitions from the Magnetawan area to do with the McGuinty sales tax. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government is planning to merge the 8% provincial sales tax and the 5% federal sales tax; and

"Whereas the new 13% sales tax will be applied to products not previously subject to provincial sales tax such as gasoline, home heating fuels, home renovations, haircuts, hamburgers, television service, Internet service, telephone and cell services, taxi fees, bus, train and airplane tickets, and dry cleaning services; and

"Whereas rural and northern Ontarians will be particularly hard hit by Mr. McGuinty's new sales tax, as will seniors and families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government should remove the new sales tax from its 2009-10 budget."

I support this petition.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt asking for a PET scan for the Sudbury Regional Hospital. It goes as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: "to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Speaker with Samuel.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of members from the Community History Project. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Community History Project (Ontario #729493) as an active member heritage community has been concerned about the loss of heritage resources including aboriginal, pioneer and inactive burial places, and the legal, social and historical implications of such losses,

"We, the undersigned, therefore request immediate and unanimous passage of Bill 149, An Act to protect Ontario's inactive cemeteries, as a first step towards preserving over 4,000 public and private heritage assets and resources."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline" for their cars, "hydro ... heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I affix my name to this petition, as I support it, and send it to the table with Samuel.

TAXATION

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition against the HST and it goes as follows:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Be it resolved, I am opposed to Dalton McGuinty's 8% sales tax grab and call on the Parliament of Ontario to cancel its plan to introduce a harmonized sales tax on July 1, 2010.".

This is signed by 950 people. I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Maggie.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I would like especially to thank the patients of Dr. C. Nguyen, whose office is at 2300 Eglinton near the Credit Valley Hospital; and certainly Matthew Brown and Wanda Ainsworth, both of Mississauga, for having signed it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Melissa, on her first week with us, to carry it for me.

1610

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over $400,000, fast food under $4, electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than $30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I want to thank Cathy Scott of Wasaga Beach for sending this petition to me, which I will sign.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of Ontarians from the Bond Head and Tottenham area. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As recently as yesterday I got another call in my office from somebody wanting to know if I would be willing to present petitions in this Legislature dealing with the harmonized sales tax, even though this legislation had been introduced. I assured her that I would, and I want to do that today.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4,

haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I affix my signature as I wholeheartedly agree with this petition.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It was sent to me by ErinoakKids. I'd like to thank Coleen McAskill of Burlington and Marilou Jack of Thomas Street in western Mississauga for having affixed their signatures to it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers. The child poverty level in Peel has grown ... between 2001 and 2006; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I support this petition. I'm pleased to affix my signature and to ask page Cairistiona to carry it for me.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time has expired for petitions.

OPPOSITION DAY

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario direct the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to call Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson before it to give evidence with respect to the Auditor General's Special Report on Ontario's Electronic Health Records Initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hudak has moved opposition day number 4.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As you are aware, the Auditor General's report on the McGuinty Liberal eHealth scandal contained many startling revelations about Canada's worst government. It exposed the government's blatant mismanagement of an agency that let a billion tax dollars go to waste, and a culture of entitlement that saw Liberal-friendly firms get rich off untendered contracts and sweetheart deals, and the Ontario families who footed the bill got nothing in return. While the Auditor General did important work, he raised some very important questions, and there is much more work to be done. There are still too many unanswered questions.

For one, the Auditor General did not probe the Liberal connections of the people who got rich off the eHealth scandal. This is important because the Premier himself has stood in this House and selectively misquoted the Auditor General to make the case that this was part of the investigation, when in fact it was not. It is the job of the public accounts committee to provide the close legislative scrutiny of how taxpayer dollars are spent, or, as is sadly the case these days, misspent. That is why the Ontario PC caucus has called for a full public inquiry into the eHealth scandal, and we will continue to do so. Only when the Ontario families who paid the bill learn the truth about who got rich, what their Liberal connections were, how deeply involved the McGuinty cabinet ministers were, who ordered government officials to obstruct the Auditor General, and whether or not crimes were committed—these are the questions that Ontario families want answered, who got ripped off, and we're not going to stop until we get those answers for Ontario families.

I will admit that I did expect that the Premier would try to obstruct a public inquiry. Certainly you always hold out hope for a different answer. But if past practice is any predictor of future behaviour, we should not be surprised that the Premier treats meaningful public accountability like it's a bad rash. But to shut down the public accounts committee, to shut down their attempt to get the truth, is a new low even for the Dalton McGuinty government.

Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson are pivotal figures in the eHealth scandal, and only they, not their successors, know the full extent of the rot that's settled over that agency under Dalton McGuinty's watch. And only Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson, and not their successors, know who got rich and to what extent they were given their marching orders from the Premier's office or Liberal insiders. Given that their personal reputations have taken a hit from their involvement in the eHealth scandal, it would not surprise me if they would welcome the opportunity to ensure their side of the story was formally entered into the record.

I notice that many Liberal backbenchers are getting increasingly restless with this scandal, and I imagine

many of them are having a very difficult time defending this scandal, defending the Liberal insiders who got rich, defending the waste of $1 billion in taxpayers' money—as my colleague from Simcoe–Grey says, defending the indefensible. I know those members, those honourable members, would also want to hear from Ms. Kramer and Mr. Hudson themselves and even ask questions on behalf of their constituents. Only one person has stood in the way of the public accounts committee hearing the testimony of Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson, and his name is Dalton McGuinty.

Through a whipped vote—

Interjections.

1620

Mr. Tim Hudak: Mr. Brown says that Dalton McGuinty wasn't on the committee. Well, he was pulling the strings, sir. He was pulling the strings that forced a whipped vote, where the Liberal MPPs in the public accounts committee, taking marching orders from the Premier's office, blocked a motion to have these two key eHealth figures testify and get on the record.

No doubt Dalton McGuinty would rather not have Ontario families know the full truth about this Liberal scandal. Just think what Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson could tell us. Maybe they could talk about Karli Farrow, a former political aide to both the Premier and the former Minister of Health and Deputy Premier George Smitherman, who among other things was paid $327 per hour by eHealth. Not only that, she was paid $327 per hour by eHealth to meet and correspond with the assistant deputy minister of health, Helen Stevenson, and Dalton McGuinty's former chief of staff and campaign director, Don Guy. Such was the work she did for $327 an hour. Or maybe Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson could talk about John Ronson, the former chair of the Liberal election campaign who works with Karli Farrow at Courtyard Group, and, by the way, was paid more than $300 an hour by eHealth for the benefit of his consulting services.

The committee has done good work so far. We heard the other day from Ron Sapsford, the former Deputy Minister of Health, who, under questioning from members of the committee, told the public accounts committee that the Premier's senior health adviser, Sacha Bhatia, met with Sarah Kramer, the Premier's hand-picked eHealth CEO, on six separate occasions during the time Kramer was handing out contracts to both Farrow and Ronson.

Kramer's itinerary also shows she not only met with Bhatia, but she met with the Premier's principal secretary, Jamison Steeve, the former Deputy Premier, George Smitherman, the Attorney General and staff from the finance minister's office. Just when the trail started leading directly into Premier McGuinty's office, he brought forward the guillotine motion to cut off debate and to shut down that committee. No doubt the Auditor General's report found that the eHealth board was reluctant to stop the spending spree of untendered contracts because they knew Sarah Kramer was Premier McGuinty's hand-picked CEO. Sarah Kramer was the Premier's original untendered contract.

The PC caucus may not be Ms. Kramer's fan club, but we do believe she deserves to have her say at the committee and tell us the truth of exactly what happened. I think you have noticed what has been taking place these last two weeks. Slowly but surely, the Premier is severing all ties that connect him to the rot at eHealth. Minister David Caplan resigned. Minister George Smitherman—gone; Deputy Health Minister Ron Sapsford—gone; Sarah Kramer, Dr. Alan Hudson and the entire eHealth board, all gone.

The resignations are well deserved. I'd hope the member from Thunder Bay would support those resignations. Hopefully he's on the record calling for them. But the fact that these key figures at the heart of the scandal lost their jobs does not mean they were the only ones responsible, nor does it mean they should get off the hook from testifying. The last remaining senior eHealth figure who has yet to lose his job is Dalton McGuinty, and now that the trail leads to his office, he wants to shut that committee down.

A billion dollars went to waste in this eHealth boondoggle. At a time when emergency rooms were closing, at a time that health care services were getting cut from Thunder Bay to Fort Erie, Dalton McGuinty wasted $1 billion in taxpayers' money and Liberal friends got rich. Family health care should not have to take a back seat to Liberal friends and sweetheart deals. If the Premier is not scared of the truth, if the Premier is not trying to hide his connections to the eHealth scandal, he should let Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson testify. If he is actually serious about transparency, about getting answers to what happened, if the Premier remains committed to integrity, then he will agree and support this motion and ask the Liberal members today to call Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson before the public accounts committee and get the answers that taxpayers deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

M^me^ France Gélinas: I'm happy to have a chance to speak to what can only be described as an ongoing disaster—an ongoing disaster that started with eHealth and that has continued today because of the reluctance of this government to come clean and put out the facts for everybody to see so that we can finally know what happened, turn the page and move on.

It is clear that what first reared its ugly head at eHealth has continued to work its way through the entire Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. New Democrats as well as the PC caucus have used the opportunity of opposition day motions to address the issues underlying not only the eHealth mess but also the lack of oversight, accountability and transparency that seems to have grown rampant within this government.

We believe that Ontarians deserve answers. We all want to get to the bottom of what happened, not only because Ontarians have a right to know but also because

we want to prevent future messes like this from happening. Only if we fully understand how this thing derailed, how eHealth derailed so badly, will we make sure that it never happens again.

We simply cannot afford to be carelessly wasting our precious health care dollars, our tax dollars, especially in times like these when government revenues are going down and the demand for services is going up. Ontario is in the midst of a recession, and we see good dollars going after bad, going out the window at eHealth and into the pockets of Liberal friends.

We have to learn from this. Ontario has to come out stronger from this, but only if we get to the bottom of what happened.

New Democrats support this motion. We have long sought answers about the $1 billion that Dalton McGuinty allowed to walk out the door. We sought answers back in the spring, when the details of this scandal started to emerge and as the eHealth scandal started to branch out in a disturbing way. It branched out to encompass more and more of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. From the $100 million in consultant contracts to the persistent reluctance to introduce appropriate transparency measures, we have sought and will continue to seek answers.

The opposition parties have tried to get answers from this government in many different ways. We have tried through question period, through opposition day motions, through the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and so on. Yet there are so many questions that beg for so many answers.

This government has dodged its responsibility for transparency and its responsibility to give answers to the people of Ontario at every opportunity. We saw this at the public accounts committee, where Mr. Hudson and Ms. Kramer were called in front of the committee. We could have had answers today. We wouldn't need this opposition day motion. We would have had the answers we needed if the government members on that committee had placed transparency ahead of partisanship. But unfortunately, they did not, and Ontarians still don't have the answers they deserve. We still haven't heard from Ms. Kramer. We still haven't heard from Dr. Hudson.

We have seen this not only in this Legislature but with the Premier himself and his role in blocking the request of the committee. We have seen this, and various heads have rolled, first at eHealth and then at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. While New Democrats have made some gains in trying to find out what happened, there are still many, many questions left unanswered. There's still so much information that would be needed to clear the air, to learn from our mistakes and to turn the page so that we can focus on a future where we've learned from our mistakes and can give the people of Ontario the assurance that it will never happen again.

1630

I brought two motions to the standing committee this past October, and they did receive support from the standing committee. These motions were created to help to prevent another agency mess. The first is for the auditor to conduct spot audits of consulting contracts, and the second is to examine how senior provincial bureaucrats in the Ministry of Health, hospitals and local health integration networks are compensated. They are important steps forward, and this is something that we can be proud of. We will have made some gains. We will, through the auditor, certainly make sure that what we learn pays off for the people of Ontario.

On Saturday, the Globe and Mail reported that the Auditor General has now informed the Ontario Hospital Association that his office will be carrying out spot audits on the use of consultants within hospitals. So the work has already started. We hope that this will act as a wake-up call to the government as well, that they can no longer hide salaries of the bureaucrats in hospital budgets and that they, too, will look at their dependence on high-priced consultants.

Through this whole process, what the New Democratic caucus has been looking for is transparency. Where do taxpayers' dollars go? We owe this to the people we represent, the people of Ontario. This is why, on November 3, New Democrats presented an opposition motion that would basically ensure that future fiascos are avoided. Here's what the motion said:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has an annual budget of almost $43 billion, the largest of any ministry;

"Whereas the Auditor General in his report on the electronic health initiative explicitly said, 'Throughout the years, oversight of the EHR initiative has not been effective';

"Whereas the MOHLTC transfers more than $14 billion to hospitals and almost $3 billion to long-term-care facilities;

"Whereas neither hospitals nor long-term-care facilities are subject to Ombudsman oversight, nor are they covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; and

"Whereas, in a number of other provinces, hospitals and long-term-care facilities are subject to Ombudsman oversight and are covered by freedom-of-information legislation;

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should act immediately to ensure that all MOHLTC transfer payment agencies, LHINs"—local health integration networks—"and all MOHLTC-funded agencies, boards and commissions are subject to Ombudsman oversight and are covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act."

All that we wanted was to give the Ombudsman oversight and make those agencies that receive enormous amounts of taxpayers' dollars covered by freedom-of-information requests. Ontarians have every right to be assured that if they or one of their loved ones gets sick, they will have access to timely, high-quality and effective care. The government could have taken concrete steps toward improving the cost effectiveness of health care in this province by expanding freedom-of-information

coverage and Ombudsman oversight to the transfer payment agencies of the Ministry of Health, to their boards and to their commissions.

At present, Ontario lags behind other provinces in ensuring accountability of health care spending and in ensuring that patients are getting the care they need. Did you know that Ontario is the only province in all of Canada that does not have Ombudsman oversight of its hospitals? Every other province in this country realized that Ombudsman oversight makes sense. It gives you better value for money, but it also leads to better care. Ontario lags behind. We are number 10. We're the only one that doesn't have it—nor does Ontario allow oversight of nursing homes and long-term-care facilities, something that Alberta, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland all allow.

In 2008-09, the number of complaints to the Ontario Ombudsman about health care doubled over the previous year, with 532 complaints. All of those complaints were serious. None of them could be followed up. They were complaints concerning people dying from C. difficile or influenza due to poor infection control. It took years to get to the bottom of those. Ombudsman oversight would have helped prevent some of the suffering and the deaths that happened through C. difficile.

There were complaints about long-term-care facility residents dying because of unsafe conditions where they lived. Here again, had we had Ombudsman oversight to follow through on some of the earlier complaints he had received, things could have panned out very differently for hundreds of people who lost their lives to C. difficile or who died in nursing homes, but all of this was turned down. He could do nothing for them. He was not allowed to investigate. Indeed, some 2,366 complaints to the Ombudsman had to be turned away because they involved municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals, long-term-care homes, children's aid societies or the police. The Ombudsman cannot investigate those complaints.

In the words of the Ombudsman himself, "These are areas where thrift, sensible government and good judgment are acutely required, yet the government of Ontario declines" the help of the Ombudsman, "and it is costing all of us." It is costing all of us through paying for services that are not needed, and it is costing all of us through pain and suffering that did not need to take place.

Unlike other provinces, the Ombudsman can only investigate complaints about hospitals in relatively rare situations. The situation at the Ministry of Health is that if a hospital is under the control of an appointed supervisor, then the Ombudsman is allowed to investigate. His role has to be extended so he has jurisdiction over hospitals, but the Liberal government turned that down.

André Marin, our present Ombudsman, has been clear and compelling in his repeated calls for Ombudsman oversight of health care facilities, yet every time he asks, the answer is the same: no. The Liberal government is not interested in Ombudsman oversight and transparency and accountability to the people of Ontario.

The Ombudsman's arguments are good arguments and certainly are arguments that we brought forward in our motion, but the Liberal members in government voted down our motion, denying the dire need for transparency and accountability that could make such a huge difference in turning the page, in restoring people's confidence in our health care system. Instead, they're leaving Ontarians vulnerable to not only spending fiascos like what we've seen at eHealth but also without proper oversight for care.

New Democrats have also been looking for answers through the legislative standing committee process. When the Auditor General delivered his much-awaited report, New Democrats were anxious to get this report in front of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. At standing committee, New Democrats introduced multiple motions. The government members on the committee voted in favour of some of these, such as spot checks for using a consultant within a hospital for work that is presently taking place. Many others were turned down. Some of them—I would say most of them—were sound motions that were brought forward so that we could clear the air and turn the page, but they were rejected on a purely partisan basis.

1640

The five Liberal members should really apologize to their constituents for voting against proposals that would have strengthened the accountability and transparency of our health care dollars. These MPPs rejected ways to make sure our cherished health care system and health care dollars are spent on care, not on bloated executive salaries.

In October, Ontarians learned that Hamilton hospital was paying the half-million-dollar salary of our Ontario deputy minister of health. Other Ontario bureaucrats are paid by government-funded organizations. You can't help, when you hear things like this, but be suspicious. What are they trying to hide? There could be completely legitimate reasons why this has been done, but you have to come clear.

As long as you turn down NDP motions that are trying to go to the bottom, you leave the doubt that this has been done to skirt a law or hide something. If you refuse transparency, then you encourage people to be suspicious of everything the government does, and this is bad for all of us; it is bad for every person in Ontario. You have to realize the value of transparency; we all will gain in the end. But it's a lesson that is really hard to get through to them. The NDP brought forward a motion to have the Auditor General review the practice, and again the Liberal majority on the committee voted it down.

I'd like to quote from OPSEU president Smokey Thomas: "It's scandalous that at a time when the health care system is being squeezed for every last dime ... the Ministry of Health is deflecting public disclosure by spending millions of dollars in executive salaries and benefits through the backdoor of publicly supported hospitals.

"This says to me it's time for real public scrutiny," Mr. Thomas said, "including an expanded role for the

Ontario auditor and the opening of hospitals to the freedom-of-information commissioner and the Ombudsman.

"This kind of secrecy with the taxpayers' dollar is unacceptable and it makes you wonder what else they're hiding."

When you turn down motions that ask for transparency, the direct result is always suspicion. I have been in the health care system long enough to know that there are many good reasons that could justify the paying of executive salaries through a hospital, but you didn't want to come clear on them. When you vote down transparency, you always get the same result: People are suspicious, people lose faith, people lose trust.

Had this motion from the NDP gone through—it was my motion, actually—and showed what were the reasons behind it, people would have understood. People would have turned the page, and trust would have started to build back. But when you turn down those motions one after the other, we get what we have now: the public of Ontario losing faith, losing trust in its government.

Mr. Thomas, of course, was referring to a report that the deputy minister had earned more than $500,000 in salary and benefits and was paid by Hamilton Health Sciences, not the Ministry of Health, and that many other senior health officials also earned income and benefits in the $300,000 range from the University Health Network rather than being paid through the Ministry of Health, which was their employer.

Mr. Thomas continued, "For too long, our hospitals have been exempt from a thorough review of their operations." He was clear: Unless the auditor, the Ombudsman and the freedom-of-information commissioner are given the right to investigate, "report and recommend changes, these hospitals will continue to operate in the shadows, well away from public oversight."

Yet in spite of all this, and the supporting strong evidence, the Liberal members voted against a motion that would have gotten to the bottom, that would have allowed the people of Ontario to turn the page on this practice and to trust that the future will be transparent. They missed that opportunity again.

At this same committee meeting the Liberal members also voted against a motion to have the former eHealth top executives, Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson, appear before the committee. The Liberals chose to shield the key players in the eHealth scandal from answering questions from committee members.

You have to realize that other witnesses made direct accusations about those people, and laid the blame on Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson for everybody to read in Hansard for the rest of their lives. But when we wanted to give those people an opportunity to defend themselves, to defend their names, to give their side of the story of what had happened, the Liberal members on the committee shut it down. They used their majority and voted down that motion.

They have essentially prevented the public from ever getting the answers as to why the $1 billion that was spent on eHealth—that much we know—benefited their $300-an-hour Liberal-friendly consultants while eHealth is still a long way from being a reality.

One of the last fiascos to hit McGuinty's sinking ship is the resignation of the Deputy Minister of Health, Mr. Ron Sapsford. This resignation is in many ways troubling, because all the cabinet shuffles and resignations mean that Ontarians may never know the full extent of insider contracts and wasted spending in the Dalton McGuinty health ministry.

It is also troubling because of the assurance of Mr. Sapsford, just weeks before his resignation, that he was not going anywhere; that he had done the best he could as a public servant to serve the people of Ontario.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Oh, exactly, but the Premier disagreed.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Yes. My colleague says, "But the Premier disagreed."

Can you blame Ontarians for wondering whether he was about to expose some dirt? Here again, by not getting to the bottom, people get suspicious.

It seems to be the case for everyone involved with this. They're either resigning or forced to leave. The same thing happened to Mr. Caplan: forced to leave, the day that the report was put forward—not that I hadn't asked for his resignation many, many times.

We have been waiting for Dalton McGuinty to take responsibility, and in our view, the ball is now squarely in Mr. Dalton McGuinty's court. The Premier needs to assure Ontario's families that they can have confidence in this government's ability to run this big system that we call our health care system.

The Ministry of Health is the biggest ministry and department, and right now, people have lost trust in its leadership. One day we hear about $1 billion wasted at eHealth. The next day, it's the bungled rollout of the H1N1 vaccine. The next day, it's emergency rooms closing their doors to a community in need, without having the support of that community.

The government seems to be using its left hand to defend the hundreds of millions of dollars that went to eHealth with little to show for it, while it uses its right hand to cut funding for long-term-care facilities—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Name a cut.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Well, they are—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: A funding cut. Name one.

M^me^ France Gélinas: They are laying people off. They are cutting programs and services. The same thing with a number of health promotion initiatives.

1650

Interjection.

M^me^ France Gélinas: My colleague from Algoma is arguing that there have been no cuts, but I beg to differ. We used to have a smoke-free strategy that included action groups in all of our communities. Those have been cut. The funding is no longer available to run those peer support smoking cessation strategies; same thing for a number of other programs.

New Democrats are again urging Premier McGuinty to take some responsibility, to use this resignation as an opportunity to make some real change. It is time to finally start directing health dollars away from well-connected insiders and back to local hospitals, front-line health care workers, community health centres, things like smoking cessation and programs and services that people depend on and count on.

A billion dollars is a lot of money. We all agree that Ontario needs an electronic health record. We all know that it will have tremendous benefits. The first one is in prescription errors. We've all gone to our physicians or our nurse practitioners, brought the little paper with our prescription and nobody can read what's written on that piece of paper. Well, with an electronic health record, everybody can read what's printed. Errors go down right there. The duplication of tests can be lowered.

We had concrete examples in Sault Ste. Marie at the Group Health Centre, which has been a pioneer in using electronic health records, of how much more smoothly their H1N1 vaccination campaign went compared to everybody else. When people were lining up in my riding in Nickel Belt and in Sudbury the week that the H1N1 vaccine rolled out, we had the weather from hell. When it wasn't raining, there was sleet or it was windy like you couldn't believe. And what we saw was terrible. We saw pregnant women, we saw families with little kids in strollers, standing outside in the wind and the cold to get their flu shot.

This is something that Ontarians will never forget. This is an image that no matter how well we try to say things went, it did not go well for those hundreds of people who stood at New Sudbury shopping mall in the wind and the cold, with their babies in strollers, in order to get the H1N1 shot, and they tried to have us believe that it went well.

Had we had the 10 years we used, the billion dollars we used for eHealth that never led us to an electronic health record, had we had an electronic health record this year, those people would not have been standing in the sleet and the cold and the wind. We would have had a way to make sure that the priority populations were identified and that those people were brought in on schedules, like the people at the Group Health Centre were able to offer to the public of Sault Ste. Marie, because they had gone ahead and implemented an electronic health record, something that eHealth was supposed to do for us.

But we didn't see any of this. What we have seen is money being given to high-priced consultants, money being given to friends of the Liberals. We've seen everybody surrounding eHealth jump ship, either through being booted out or leaving before the ship had sunk. When we try to go to the bottom of it, what do we see? We see a Liberal government that wants to shield us from the bottom of this. We see a Liberal government that does not want transparency and does not want accountability. We see a Liberal government that lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of people who have no way to defend themselves, who have no way to be heard because they won't let them be heard.

The motion from the PC caucus is clear: That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario direct the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to call Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson before it to give evidence with respect to the Auditor General's special report.

I have a feeling that the Liberal members of this House will continue to behave the way they've been behaving since the beginning. They will prevent those people from giving their version of what happened. What will we have on record? We will have all sorts of people accusing Mrs. Kramer and Dr. Hudson of having done all the wrongs in that story, yet they will have never had an opportunity to defend their names. They will never have been given an opportunity to give their side of the story.

This is what this motion is about: to listen to the other side of the story, the people who were there, the people who are being blamed, the people who are being accused of all the wrongdoings that went on at eHealth. This motion is giving them a chance to be heard; it's giving them a chance to defend themselves.

I certainly hope that the Liberal members in this Legislative Assembly will see fit for those people to come and give their side of the story, if for nothing else to defend their name, to clear the air and to learn from the past so that we can turn the page, rebuild confidence and stop being suspicious of every move this government makes. I hope this motion goes through.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I appreciate the opportunity to speak for a few minutes on this motion today. I'll be sharing my time. We have four or five other members who are interested in speaking today as well, so I will dive into mine very soon.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to introduce, in the members' east gallery, visiting today from the Thunder Bay Police Association: their president, Keith Hobbs; my brother, Jim "Cheech" Mauro; Brian Crocker, a director, has stepped out; but they also have Duane Wenmann here from the Wawa detachment. I was hoping that the member from Simcoe North would be here. I know the members of the Thunder Bay association always enjoy his company.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Mauro: He's going to be here? Maybe they'll see him at 5:30 downstairs in the lobby. We'll look forward to that.

As I said, I'm pleased to be able to have a few minutes on this topic. As I said, many members are interested in speaking to it as well.

I would like to begin by reinforcing a message that I think most members of the Legislature and people who have been following this issue on television or in the media have heard. When the Premier has spoken on this topic, when the Minister of Finance has spoken on this topic and when any of us as Liberal MPPs have spoken on it, there has been a very clear acknowledgement that

on this process associated with eHealth there has not been what we consider value for money. That is not something that anybody on this side of the Legislature or those in the front bench has tried to shirk or skirt, as was asserted here earlier by some of the other speakers. There has been a very clear acknowledgement that we could have done better, that we will do better and that we have taken significant steps forward so that this will not happen again.

But to go as far as the opposition members have been going, on a regular basis, both the official opposition and the members of the third party, and suggest that this has been a $1-billion waste of money or a complete boondoggle, as if to convey to the members of the listening public that $1 billion went down the drain and nothing was achieved for that money, is obviously completely disingenuous and completely misleading the public who are interested in this issue.

As we know, there was a predecessor to eHealth. It was called Smart Systems for Health. In fact, that agency was set up under the previous government, the Conservative government, sometime around 2002. Under Smart Systems for Health—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Speaker: I believe the member has used the word "misleading," which I think is inappropriate in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you for the comment. We'll continue with the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: In fact, Smart Systems for Health was established as an agency under their previous government. Within Smart Systems for Health, in the time that they were still in government, in excess of $100 million was expended on this particular initiative. To suggest that it all happened under our watch is not correct. Beyond that, to further suggest that nothing has been achieved through the expenditure of these funds to this point is further misleading the public. Here is what has occurred—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I just remind the member to watch his language and phrase his comments in such a way that doesn't interfere.

1700

Mr. Bill Mauro: I will use whatever language—I'm open to suggestions from the members opposite. If they want me to say what they're saying is not accurate, I'm happy to say that. If I can't say "misleading," I'll say it's not accurate for them to suggest that nothing has been achieved.

Here is what has been achieved so far, when they want to say one billion went down the drain. More than one million children have electronic health records. Since 2005, more than four million Ontarians are already participating in the electronic medical records program run in partnership between the province and the Ontario Medical Association. Since 2008, some 80,000 Ontarians are in a pilot project for ePrescribing which will help save lives. All Ontario hospitals have gone filmless and are now using digital diagnostic scans, ultimately allowing for scans to be shared across the province. The RFQ for a diabetes registry closed August 28, and the responses are now being evaluated. Far from nothing being accomplished when it comes to the expenditure of funds under eHealth, there has been significant progress made, and I think it's important that we get that on the record.

But again, we have stated very clearly on a consistent basis that we can do better. On this issue, the opposition parties have been having a great deal of fun in terms of trying to paint this—a significant attempt at political partisanship in terms of what's gone on in eHealth.

In fact, separate from eHealth, last week I was hoping the member from the third party would be here, the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the former leader of the New Democratic Party, who last week went off in terms of his suggestions—

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're not to mention the member's attendance.

Mr. Bill Mauro: This is what this is about. There's a fair connection here where the member started to imply that our government was somehow tied inappropriately to Buchanan. We're seeing the same thing occurring here with members of the third party; they want to talk about political partisanship and the awarding of contracts in eHealth.

The auditor spoke very clearly on this issue, and it's important before we read what he said to remind people in the province of Ontario that the auditor is an independent officer of this Legislative Assembly. The independent officer does not report to the government. He reports to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Beyond that, the auditor has a whole fleet of other auditors who work on his behalf. They did the work. Here's what they had to say on this particular issue: "We were aware of the allegations that 'party politics' may have entered into the awarding of contracts and that those awarding the contracts may have obtained a personal benefit from the firms getting the work—but we saw no evidence of this during our work."

That's what the auditor had to say. That's part of the record that the members of the opposition parties are neglecting to include in their rhetoric whenever they have an opportunity to speak on this issue.

Fundamentally, what absolutely has to occur here is there needs to be a different take on how governments, no matter their political stripe, choose to deal with agencies in the province of Ontario. There are 650 of them in the province, give or take a few—650. As an elected member provincially, I know that I sometimes have a difficult time, and I'm sure members of the opposition parties and other members of the government side do as well. When you're dealing with constituents in your own riding or across the province of Ontario and you have to try and explain to them that that was an agency that was responsible for something and that the government is not directly involved in the day-to-day

operation of that particular agency, the constituent looks at you, their eyes begin to glaze over, and they don't completely grasp what it is you're trying to say to them because, in their minds—and correctly so—at the end of the day, the government maintains responsibility for those agencies because, in fact, we fund them.

What has to happen, and I know that some of our members will address those steps that we're taking, because my time is almost up—we are taking steps in that regard. It's my opinion that when it comes to expenditures within agencies, all governments, ours and theirs before them—and I know that Mr. Levac is likely to stand up and provide some historical perspective on what happened under that government's watch when they were in power between 1995 and 2003. Something has to happen from a government top-down level so that we have greater control over the expenditure of funds through 650 different agencies in the province of Ontario.

I believe it's incumbent on all of us to ensure that we get better at this and that we ensure on a go-forward basis, whether it's a Liberal government, a Conservative government or an NDP government, that we all have a better handle on how those funds are spent.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I share the thoughts of Madame Gélinas from Nickel Belt, that it is in fact sad that we're here today at all debating this motion. Did we have to take it to this extent to try to get to the bottom of an issue that the Premier of Ontario refuses to do? It is regrettable that in spite of his posturing about accountability, transparency, a new way and his insistence on public inquiries and the like when he was in opposition, when he got the keys to the Premier's office, Dalton McGuinty changed. That is sad.

What we're asking for is that Alan Hudson and Sarah Kramer be called before the public accounts committee to testify as to what they know about what went wrong with $1 billion of money that was spent, and much of it misspent, at eHealth.

The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan wants to say that a lot of good things happen. Well, he'd better read and listen to the whole report of the auditor. For much of that money—in fact, most of that money—there are no results. We didn't say they did absolutely nothing for the six years they've been in government; it's been close—the auditor says it's been close to nothing.

Here we are, reaching this point in the Legislature today where we have to bring it to the House to try to get the Premier to do what the committee could have done only if he allowed them to do it. But the trained seals who man those committees—and you've got to understand the committee makeup here in the province as opposed to the federal government. We don't have the power, we don't have the majority in opposition to try to force the committee or to win a vote on committee. Only the government can do that.

You know, the other day I was talking to a senior member of staff here who was explaining the murals. The murals up in the corner of that ceiling that are somewhat exposed—they have been working on trying to remove the covering. You see, what happened was Premier Mitchell Hepburn, a Liberal Premier, had them covered over. He had the whole place whitewashed. The Premier of today is trying to repeat history. He wants to whitewash what the public accounts committee is doing. He wants to eviscerate the committee so that Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson cannot testify.

The people of the province of Ontario want the facts. They want the truth and they deserve no less. I would say to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan and every other Liberal backbencher, I hope you're prepared. I hope you're prepared in 2011 to talk to your constituents. The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan talked about explaining to his constituents. Well, I hope they're prepared to explain to their constituents why the Premier of Ontario refused to allow the people access to the facts about what happened to $1 billion and the role they played as legislators in blocking that access and that information for the people of Ontario.

We've asked for Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson to come before that committee. I share the belief, unfortunately, that Madame Gélinas does, that they will not accept this motion and they will not support it. In fact, we're more likely to be able to get Stanley Kramer and Henry Hudson before this committee than Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson, because the Liberal people on that side are going to block it. Shame on them.

This is your last chance to stand up for the truth, to stand up as backbenchers for your constituents and help us find out what happened to $1 billion. If you're not afraid of the truth, then you have nothing to hide.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. David Orazietti: I'm pleased to join the debate this evening on the opposition motion. I appreciate the views from the members opposite on the issue that's before us, but I think we've been very clear on this: We have asked the auditor to intervene to review the expenditures at eHealth and also expanded the power of the auditor to a number of other organizations. That report was brought back on October 7, 2009, and we know what the auditor said. So everyone on this side of the House is certainly aware of the fact that we want to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent wisely in the province of Ontario. I think every member in this House is concerned about how taxpayers' money is spent.

1710

The issue and the challenges around electronic medical records are, in part, the delivery. I can tell you that in my community in Sault Ste. Marie over the last number of months, the vaccinations that have been taking place with respect to H1N1 have been going very, very well and very smoothly in our community. It was reported in the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail and so on. The benefit and the importance of electronic medical records at the Group Health Centre in Sault Ste. Marie and the partnership that has been formed with the

public health branch in Sault Ste. Marie is the reason why those vaccinations have been going very smoothly in our community. Our community is an example of how electronic medical records should be delivered in the province of Ontario.

So let's not confuse the issue. Because there are issues around certain individuals who were involved in the delivery and the development of electronic medical records in the province, it's not fair to say that nothing was done with the expenditure of the money. And it's not fair to say that electronic medical records don't have merit and this is not a worthy initiative, because we all know that electronic medical records being put in place in Ontario will save us millions of dollars and will also help to save lives in this province. It's that timely access to care and that one-stop shopping of an electronic medical record that has the background information of an individual that helps doctors and medical professionals diagnose and treat and take care of individuals in the province of Ontario.

With respect, a number of steps have been taken to ensure that what happened and what took place at eHealth doesn't happen again at any other organization in the province of Ontario. We know that in 2002, the Conservative government invested $41 million on Smart Systems for Health, which is really the predecessor for eHealth. Also, $77 million in the 2003 budget was allocated, or $118 million. I think they recognized the benefits of electronic medical records. We certainly recognize the benefit of electronic medical records, and I can certainly see the benefits in my community first-hand.

We know that in the auditor's report there were a number of recommendations that were put forward. The auditor made the comment that he did with respect to party politics supposedly entering into the awarding of contracts and that the awarding of those contracts may have obtained personal benefit from the firms that were getting the work, and the auditor concluded, "but we saw no evidence of this during our work." That's on page 11 in the auditor's report. We're confident, on this side of the House, in the auditor's recommendations in the third party review that was done by the auditor with respect to the expenditure of dollars.

There's another issue that is probably a little broader in context around this, and it speaks to credibility and accountability. On this side of the House, that's something that we are striving to increase transparency and accountability on. I think members opposite who had the opportunity while in government to take those steps didn't take those steps when we're talking about, for example, freedom-of-information requests. There are a number of organizations now in the province of Ontario where freedom-of-information requests are made available to the public, and neither the Conservatives nor the NDP, when they were in government, took those steps to ensure that the public had access to that information. Some of those organizations include the Lottery and Gaming Corp., Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One, Cancer Care Ontario, the WSIB, the LCBO, eHealth, the Ontario Realty Corp. and so on. There are countless organizations here that have been brought under this umbrella of greater scrutiny in the province of Ontario because I think all members in the Legislature want to ensure that the dollars that are spent in any arm's-length crown corporation or crown agency are spent wisely and that taxpayers are getting value for the money that is being spent.

Those are a number of examples in terms of where we're going with freedom-of-information requests, transparency and accountability for numerous organizations across the province.

With respect to the progress that was made in eHealth, we know there were dollars that were spent to develop electronic medical records. There are more than one million children in the province of Ontario that now have an electronic medical record, and since 2005, more than four million Ontarians are already participating in electronic medical records. We know that this is a very, very important medical tool for treatment and diagnosis of disease, and the health and well-being of Ontarians in this province. Our commitment is that by 2015 we will ensure that all individuals in the province have electronic medical records, because we know there is a tremendous benefit to having those medical records.

There was a comment that was made in the Toronto Star by a physician, Ron Charach, who said, "Let's hope the endless buzzing around the cost of the ambitious eHealth initiative doesn't end up sidelining the project. There are far greater costs to the public of not having centralized medical data, in terms of tests being frequently reordered, and specialists asking questions for which patients have no answers."

I think we all understand the tremendous benefit of having electronic medical records in the province of Ontario, and I understand, with respect to the motion, that we're talking about having a couple of individuals interviewed with respect to this. I'm satisfied with the auditor's report. I'm satisfied that the auditor has taken the steps necessary to ensure greater accountability and greater transparency of not only the eHealth organization but a number of other organizations in the province that we expect to be spending taxpayers' money wisely.

I know, with respect to the expenditure of dollars in health care, our community has benefited tremendously. In 2003, the expenditure on health care in this province was about $29 billion. Today the expenditure is $42.5 billion. It has meant new hospitals, in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie a nurse practitioner clinic, funding for the Group Health Centre, more equipment, more nurses, greater home care services and more long-term-care beds. On this side of the House, we know that we have made a 45% increase in health care spending in only the last six years—very substantial and very significant. I know that in my community of Sault Ste. Marie, residents are very pleased with the progress we've made with respect to health care funding.

I think the issue that's been raised today and this evening with respect to an inquiry, or individuals being

requested to provide information—those individuals can certainly provide whatever information they would like to provide to the public whenever they feel they would like to make those comments. No one is preventing them from saying that. I think we've been clear. We've taken the steps that were necessary, that required the auditor to come forward and do this review and provide the report. We have committed to implementing every recommendation that the auditor has made and we are doing that.

I know there are other members who want to make comments on the motion, and that's my time this evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to speak to this motion which has been brought forward today by our leader, Tim Hudak. The motion calls for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the public accounts committee to call Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson before it to give evidence with respect to the Auditor General's report on Ontario's Electronic Health Records Initiative.

This is a disgraceful situation, and the Auditor General has certainly uncovered the fact that the McGuinty government allowed consultants and others to run amok as the province spent $1 billion over the last seven years in an attempt to create electronic health records, without any tangible results. And the auditor's damning report into eHealth Ontario and its predecessor, the Smart Systems for Health Agency, also linked the awarding of millions of dollars in untendered contracts to the Premier's role in the hiring of eHealth Ontario's former chief executive officer, Sarah Kramer. It is regrettable that Ontario taxpayers did not get any value for the $1 billion that has been spent on projects to create electronic health records. In fact it's unfortunate, because these records would actually improve care for people with chronic disease; they would allow for greater efficiency in interactions with patients; they would improve patient safety and patient participation in their own health outcomes.

1720

We have been aware of the scandalous abuse of taxpayer money now for some time. In fact, I want to thank the staffers, the former staffers and people who have come to us and provided us with information since 2008 because they became concerned about the spending of this government.

I also just want to set the record straight, because the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan tried to take credit for any progress that had been made in the area of electronic health network records. The linkage of pharmacies is as a result of initiatives that were begun by Ruth Grier and completed by Jim Wilson and myself and our government under Michael Harris. I also want to let you know that the electronic child health network was created in 1997, and the reason, now 10 years later, almost all of the children who have been in a hospital have an electronic health record is thanks to the Conservative government. It had absolutely nothing to do with the McGuinty government. I also want to remind you that it was our government that established Telehealth. I also want to let you know that the reason there has been any success in the immunization of people with the H1N1 vaccine is because of the universal flu vaccine that we put in place, and that's the reason that there's any infrastructure whatsoever.

This government has a big, big problem. You have spent $1 billion. You have absolutely nothing to show for it, and we are calling today on the government to allow us to bring before the committee Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson. It is imperative that taxpayers know the full story, and we know that the tale leads right to the Premier's office.

We have been looking at this issue since June 2008. In fact, I made a statement in the House in that month saying that the money that you had spent produced few, if any, deliverables. Remember the operational review conducted by Deloitte in 2006? It also demonstrated that we had no deliverables. So we asked Premier McGuinty to put in place an aggressive plan and deal with the fact that there were no tangible results. What did he do? He totally ignored us. After waiting for him to take action on an aggressive turnaround plan, what did he do? He merely rebranded the Smart Systems for Health Agency and called it eHealth Ontario. That's what happened.

We asked that you call in the Auditor General to conduct a value-for-money audit. Well, you didn't do that either. That was when we had uncovered the expenses: food expenses for consultants, $45,000; $231,000 on hotels for consultants; $24,000 on furniture for Sarah Kramer's office; $1,000 on artwork for her office; and the list goes on and on. Your Premier and your government have known about the waste and the scandalous abuse of taxpayer money since 2008—in fact, we can go back to the Deloitte report in 2006—yet you stonewall, and you refuse to allow the committee to bring before it two of the key players who could shed some light on how all of this happened. You have ducked and you have dodged our questions and our concerns.

Today the stonewalling should stop. There are unanswered questions. We bring this motion forward today. We want to make sure that this abuse of taxpayer money never happens again. We want to make sure that all ministers provide the oversight that is necessary. I urge you today: Vote according to your conscience. Support our motion. Allow the public accounts committee to bring in Sarah Kramer and Dr. Hudson.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate immensely the opportunity to put on the record some comments regarding the opposition day motion.

First and foremost, I will be following the rules that are guiding us in the standing orders regarding debate, and it says in section VI, part 23:

"In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she....

"(h) Makes allegations against another member.

"(i) Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member.

"(j) Charges another member with uttering a deliberate falsehood.

"(k) Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

I plan to follow that rule in this House today, Speaker, because it's important for us to engage in why we're debating this.

So, let's call this what it is. It's politics. We're in this place because it's political, and what politics are being played here? The politics of smelling blood; "I gotcha" politics. This is not about any government of any sort not having any problems to solve, because the glass breaking from a stone being thrown by somebody who lives in a glass house is deafening.

The reality is, right now what we heard from the last speaker plus others who have gone before is basically the rooster crowing because the rooster's taking credit for the sun rising. As I've said many, many times before, the place is fluid and the fluidity we're talking about is identifying a problem, and the people of Ontario—and the Leader of the Opposition tells us what it is that families want. What is it that Ontario families want? They want this cackling back and forth? No, they don't. You know what they want? They want good health care. They want good education. They want good social services delivered for the good of the people. They want these problems solved now.

Do we acknowledge that there have been some problems? Absolutely. The member for Thunder Bay captured it beautifully when he said, "It's about getting the problem solved." To me, it's not what governments do to prevent that problem. That's an important aspect of it, but when it rears its ugly head, what do you do to solve it?

So, let's talk about what's been done to solve it in a very clear case. Under Premier McGuinty's direction, we've eliminated any sole-source contracts. All new Ontario government consultant contracts must follow a competitive hiring process, regardless of the dollar value—unheard of in any other government. Consultants will no longer be able to bill for hospitality, food expenses or incidental costs. Management, information technology, technical services, research and development, policy development and communication consultants are covered by these new rules, and all employees of Ontario's largest agencies, boards and commissions will be required to have their expenses reviewed by Ontario's Integrity Commissioner. That tells me it's a response to making sure that the problem gets solved.

But let's talk about the further steps that have been taken, and we've also taken additional steps. The McGuinty Liberals have also simplified the rules on expenses. These new rules are shorter, clearer, cleaner and posted online for all to see. A 25-page outline will be shortened down to two, and it will require that all OPS employees and employees at our largest agencies, boards and commissions receive online mandatory training on expense claims.

Starting April 1, 2010, there will be a posting of expenses of OPS senior management, cabinet ministers, political staff and senior executives at Ontario's 22 largest agencies online. This will hold these employees to the same standard as cabinet ministers and political staff—problems solved. We'll increase the number of random audits and expenses to ensure rules are being followed.

During annual audits of Ontario's agencies, boards and commissions, external auditors will be required to look at expense practices to ensure rules and controls are in place and are being followed. If the Integrity Commissioner determines that all or part of the expense is not allowable, she—at this time, she—or he may require repayment of the expenses in whole or in part. That's an action to solve the problem.

What we have here today is a motion that basically says, "We gotcha. Let's keep bleeding you, but don't worry about the solutions." This is what it is common to have happen. Quite frankly, sitting on that side, that's what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to try to cut us up. They're supposed to try to find fault, and they're doing it pretty good. But the way I look at it, it's the rhetoric that I'm hearing that simply says that this is about scoring points. It's not about the collection—and the two members on this side who spoke before me reviewed quite clearly the good that's happened as electronic records are supposed to develop and evolve. Of course, we still hear the rooster crowing, because they're sitting back, from a member who actually wasn't even sitting in this place before, taking credit for the sun rising. We're bad; they're good. That's what we're talking about.

1730

What I would rather talk about is finding out: What did we do to correct it, and have we admitted it? Absolutely; it's not acceptable in this day and age for the things that were happening to happen. I was asked if I would consider doing a historical retrospect, and you know what? I don't have enough time. Quite frankly, over eight years of Mr. Harris, the same kinds of things happened. They took steps to try to correct them and they did add some things that plugged the holes. For people to stand up and start beating their chests, ripping their robes and gnashing their teeth that this is the worst, this is Armageddon—it's not Armageddon. What it is is a place for us to find the problems, fix them, make them better and put into place people who can do what I said is the priority. The priority is good health care, good education, good social safety nets, the things people are looking for—not the games that are getting played, not the dog whistles that are being blown, but speaking to the reality of the problems that have been identified.

The Auditor General gave us a report. We honoured that. We're doing all of those reports, and thankfully we're getting it done—quite frankly, faster than what was done in the previous historical reference that I made.

But it's their job. They're going on a glory-fishing expedition. Listen carefully to the arguments, because it sounds very much like the poetry of opposition versus the prose of government. Listen carefully: All it is is scoring political points.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to the opposition motion by the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook. What we are simply asking from the Legislature today is to have a public accounts committee call the main players of the eHealth saga to answer those questions about who knew what about this billion-dollar boondoggle.

What we know so far is troubling to anyone. We know that the Premier's hand-selected head of eHealth has direct ties back to his office from this scandal. We also know that under successive ministers, hundreds of millions of dollars in untendered contracts went to Liberal-friendly consultants who allegedly worked in eHealth.

When all of this came to light, the Premier and the minister announced with great fanfare that they had called in PriceWaterhouse to do an external audit on eHealth. The Premier said that he wanted to get to the bottom of the scandal. He was as troubled and shocked at the allegations as we were. A few months later, with much fanfare the government announced they hadn't actually retained PriceWaterhouse to do the audit. They were convinced it would just be a duplicate of the work the Provincial Auditor was doing at the time, and we supposedly were just to forget about it.

The Premier and the Minister of Health at that time repeatedly said that an external audit was being done and conducted, when it was clear that there was no intention of doing one. This was a PR exercise and nothing more. Of course, in committee we also called for an investigation of the legislative committee. We all know what happened there. In a vote that was clearly whipped by the Premier's office, the Liberal members of the committee voted to sweep the whole matter under the rug. They voted against our motion in committee to hear from the people involved in eHealth in an attempt to make it all go away.

When the Provincial Auditor appeared before the public accounts committee, he gave explosive testimony that the Premier himself misrepresented his report on the billion-dollar boondoggle also known as eHealth. He particularly singled out the powerful Management Board of Cabinet for changing rules around untendered contracts specifically for eHealth. As well, the Auditor General made it clear to the public accounts committee that he did not even attempt to probe the political ties of all the people involved in this scandal. The Premier knew this and still insisted that the Provincial Auditor cleared the Liberal Party of any wrongdoing. The Provincial Auditor did no such thing.

The eHealth scandal is about far more than Liberal consultants getting rich off the provincial Treasurer; it speaks to the very real culture of entitlement that this government has. It's almost like there are two types of Ontarians: those who are connected to the Liberal Party and those who are footing the bill and paying.

I'm going to wind up my remarks—I don't have too long to speak—but over the last number of years, this Premier and successive Ministers of Health have resided over the squandering of $1 billion on eHealth, with nothing to show for it. Even Ms. Kramer admitted on CBC Newsworld that the money had been wasted.

I would urge all members to support today's resolution. It's a good way to get to the bottom of the eHealth mess. That's the best way to prevent it from happening again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to get a few words on the record regarding the motion that has been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. I just want to pick up a theme that was developed by my good friend the member from Brant about how politics and inside baseball are being played here.

It's interesting that a number of weeks ago I had the opportunity to speak on a similar motion. The official opposition, a number of weeks ago, asked for a full public inquiry; today it's asking for a number of individuals to appear before the public accounts committee.

During their time in office, there was a tragic situation that occurred at Ipperwash related to the death of Dudley George. If you take the opportunity to look through Hansard over those eight years, there was a consistent request from this side of the House, particularly from the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, the Honourable Gerry Phillips, to have a full public inquiry into the events surrounding the tragic death of Dudley George; that was denied on numerous occasions. The opposition, then in government, voted it down time and time and time again.

Then, when the Liberal opposition of the day requested—similar to what's being requested today—people to come forward at a legislative committee to testify on what their knowledge was of those events, it was denied each and every time. So as I tell people, my favourite part of the Bible is John 23: "Let he who has no sin cast the first stone." That is a very relevant biblical reference today.

Let me look at this notion with regard to eHealth that $1 billion went down the drain. An expert that I have great respect for, Mr. Rob Devitt, was the former CEO of the old Civic Hospital of Peterborough and somebody I got to know rather well because I was a city councillor when he was the CEO. On November 14, he did an extensive interview with Steve Paikin on The Agenda, specifically dealing with the situation at eHealth and his role as the interim CEO.

The first question that was asked of Mr. Devitt by Mr. Paikin—I want to quote from the transcript because I have the full transcript here. He asked, "I want to ask you

... is there anything good happening at eHealth these days?" Mr. Devitt said, "First of all, let's start with the patient and work our way back. Monday"—that was November 9—"I was in Peterborough with one of the ... family health teams seeing first-hand how electronic health records, financed through initiatives like eHealth Ontario, are helping in the fight against H1N1. It was such a, to me, moving opportunity to understand why eHealth is so important."

Mr. Devitt goes on to say, "For instance, five years ago, if a physician was trying to identify their high-risk patients eligible for the H1N1 vaccine, it would have meant going to walls of paper charts, plowing through them, trying to identify the patients. What I learned from the visit to Peterborough was how this is being done with a couple of key strokes on the computer, allowing a physician to notify all of their high-risk patients about the need to get" their vaccine. I think that certainly points to some of the good that has come out of the investment in eHealth in the province of Ontario.

Interestingly enough, once there were some very significant questions raised about the expenditure of dollars at eHealth, the Premier of the day quite wisely called in the Auditor General to do a very extensive review. I had the opportunity, as a sub on the public accounts committee, to hear Jim McCarter, an honourable man, a man who is renowned in the field of public accounting, asking a whole series of questions, which he answered, with regard to issues related to eHealth.

We talk about Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson being hired particularly to handle the task at eHealth. Well, it's safe to say that the Premier, of course, put confidence in Sarah Kramer and Alan Hudson to carry out their job, to carry out their task, and indeed at the same time to make sure that taxpayers' dollars that were being invested in eHealth would be put to the purpose they were designed for. From time to time, we all put faith in individuals who don't carry out our expectations—and as soon as that was discovered with regard to Ms. Kramer and Alan Hudson, the right thing was done: They were dismissed, and the Premier called in the Auditor General to do a full and extensive review.

1740

Again, I think it's important to get on the record what the Auditor General said on page 11: "We were aware of the allegations that 'party politics' may have entered into the awarding of contracts and that those awarding the contracts may have obtained a personal benefit from the firms getting the work—but we saw no evidence of this during our work."

There's no question that it is a complete exaggeration to say that $1 billion was flushed down the drain with our investment in eHealth. If you'd just take the time, I ask members of the House to get a copy of the transcript from Mr. Devitt, take the opportunity to read this transcript, and he clearly identifies the investments that were made in eHealth that are really helping deliver—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'd like to begin by saying that for a government that continues to boast about being transparent, we certainly have not seen any evidence of their transparency. Rather, we have seen resistance and a government that is desperate to keep their secrets in the closet.

The PC Party has called on the public accounts committee to call former eHealth CEO Sarah Kramer and former eHealth board chair Dr. Alan Hudson forward for questioning. It seems as though everyone within this eHealth debacle was unaware or has convenient memory loss of what was going on. The Premier won't answer questions. The member from Don Valley East was thrown under the bus and has stepped down as Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. His predecessor, the member from Toronto Centre, gave himself a get-out-of-jail-free card and is bolting to the exit door to avoid further scrutiny.

On Friday, we learned that the deputy minister, who has continuously said he was unaware of the scandalous process at eHealth, has also resigned. The former deputy minister has repeatedly told us that he was not aware of the many untendered contracts. Well, he told us in committee that he had regularly scheduled meetings with Dr. Alan Hudson and with Ms. Kramer. What did they talk about at those meetings? My colleague also asked the deputy minister to whom Dr. Alan Hudson reported, as it was made clear in committee that it was not to the deputy. So who did he report to? Did he report directly to the minister? The Premier? Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson must have answers—answers that the people of Ontario deserve to know.

From this government's actions, it is evident that they don't want to risk that Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson might well tell who was really running the show and calling the shots at eHealth. If there is nothing to hide and nobody knew what everyone else at eHealth was doing, why is the public accounts committee preventing Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson from appearing? One billion dollars has vanished with virtually nothing to show for it.

Let me elaborate on a few connections between the Courtyard Group and the McGuinty Liberals. This is a firm that was co-founded by a former Liberal staffer, a Liberal fundraiser and past co-chair of a Liberal election campaign, John Ronson. The other co-founder, Michael Guerriere, is a former co-worker of Dr. Alan Hudson at the University Health Network. Guerriere didn't just benefit from the McGuinty Liberals' generous contracts to Courtyard Group; he was also serving as the VP of strategy for eHealth Ontario, making—get this—$3,145 a day.

I think it is also worth highlighting again that Courtyard also employed a former chief of staff to the member from Toronto Centre and a former director of policy and research to the Premier, Karli Farrow.

It gets better. While Ontarians are out there struggling, Mr. Ronson billed taxpayers $393 an hour, Ms. Farrow billed taxpayers $327 an hour, and Mr. Guerriere, as I said, $3,145 a day.

I should also mention that Mr. Guerriere is the principal consultant for Anzen Consulting, another firm that benefited tremendously from these untendered contracts, as well as being a firm that employs—guess who?—Mr. Guerriere's wife, Miyo Yamashita. Ms. Yamashita is best known as the consultant who charged Ontario taxpayers $300 an hour to read the New York Times, listen to voice-mail and have a conversation on the subway. Ms. Kramer signed off on those untendered contracts, and Dr. Hudson signed off on hers.

It's time for the McGuinty Liberals to come clean, and that begins with bringing Ms. Kramer and Dr. Hudson to the fore. As an elected official here, regardless of your political stripe, it is your responsibility as every single MPP to stand up and vote in favour of this motion. The public will know which members here today support the public's right to know the truth.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The night before Halloween is known as devil's night in Detroit. I attended a rally in Windsor. There were a couple of hundred people protesting the eHealth scandal; 200 people with signs reading, "Where is the money?" and, "We want our money back." I know that there were a number of members here who would be aware of that rally along the Detroit River. They may want to try and ignore that kind of indication of the mounting opposition to not only uncontrolled spending but unaccountable misspending—I think I'll use that term. Those people marching are tired of this government's 3D approach to provincial politics. When a government like this one is caught with its hand in the cookie jar, it falls back on a 3D approach of dodge, delay and denounce.

Let's be clear: $1 billion has disappeared because of the eHealth boondoggle, at a time when many emergency departments are being closed. I think of Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Petrolia, and perhaps Hagersville in my riding. Now is the time for scrutiny. It's time for a new set of 3D policy: a policy based on deterrence, a policy based on detection and a policy based on disclosure. The allowance of Kramer and Hudson to testify in front of the public accounts committee would be a good first step.

I obviously stand in support of this motion to have the public accounts committee call forward Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson. I do that with the realization that I am speaking to members who have their marching orders. They have cotton in their ears. They have the blinders on. It's almost as if these allegations and these whispers of bid-rigging and price-fixing and waste and fraud and abuse do not exist. So it's with this realization that we see the rapid-fire political tricks, the closure, the time allocation motions and other tricks to silence dissent.

It's very important, as I feel that as we discuss this misspending of money in the context of an economic downturn, we have to go back to a system of management that involves, at minimum, not only planning but proper control.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time has expired.

Mr. Hudak has moved opposition day number four. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hillier, Randy	Prue, Michael
Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Paul	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gélinas, France	Murdoch, Bill	
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those opposed, please rise.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoskins, Eric	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Jaczek, Helena	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Johnson, Rick	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Rinaldi, Lou
Carroll, Aileen	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Chan, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, Dave	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 25; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

TAXATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Nepean–Carleton has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Finance. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the parliamentary assistant, the

member for Pickering–Scarborough East, may reply for up to five minutes. The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm actually astonished. The moment you said we were rising on the adjournment proceedings, 45 Liberals walked out of the chamber. I must say that this is appalling. Not only did they just subvert democracy by pushing away the ability for us to bring forward—

Interjections.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): No, there can't be a point of order during this period. I would just remind the member, though, not to refer to the presence or absence of members.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In a few minutes we'll try and get a response out of someone from the Liberal government—it is not clear—on why they're trying to block public hearings in Cornwall, Kingston, Thunder Bay, North Bay, London and several communities like Strathroy, Sarnia, Thornhill and others right across the province for those hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are opposed to the harmonized sales tax.

What is happening to democracy in this chamber is astounding. Not only did we just see a Liberal government block the ability of the official opposition to bring two of the key characters in the eHealth billion-dollar scandal before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts; the reality is we're not able to get the answers we deserve, nor are Ontarians able to come to this chamber or to their own community centres to speak to Ontario legislators about their concerns over a $3-billion tax grab that is going to add 8% more to their home heating, to their maintenance fees, to their snow removal, to their Christmas tree, for heaven's sake—

Interjection: To kids' sports.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —to children's sports, and to so many other items right across this province.

It used to be said that there were two things certain in life: death and taxes. Now we have three: death, taxes, and death and taxes, thanks to Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Wilkinson.

We will stand in opposition to that $3-billion tax grab on Ontarians at the worst possible time: at a time when Ontarians are out of work; at a time when we are accepting welfare payments for the first time ever as a partner in Confederation; at a time when 300,000 Ontarians are out of well-paying manufacturing jobs, because of them. And what do they have to show for it? A $25-billion deficit. That's why they don't want to go to Cornwall, to Kingston, to Thunder Bay, to Sarnia, to North Bay, to London, to Brampton. That's why they don't want to go to community centres right across this province: They don't want to hear the truth.

Instead, what they're going to do is try to ram this HST through this Ontario Legislature before Christmas. They're going to try to pass into law, through the back door—

Mr. Peter Shurman: Merry Christmas.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —a $3-billion tax grab, and as my colleague Peter Shurman just said, Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas—8% more. And what they won't do is bring this to their constituents.

As we all know on this side of the House—not only the Progressive Conservative caucus, but our friends and colleagues in the New Democrats—the reality is that Ontarians don't want this. They're e-mailing us.

I can tell you another thing: The people of Nepean–Carleton are no different from the people of Ottawa South, Ottawa West–Nepean, Ottawa–Orléans, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Those people don't have a true voice in the Ontario Legislature. Those people have a Liberal MPP who is listening to Dwight Duncan force this through the Legislature. So those folks are coming to Nepean–Carleton; they're going to Carleton–Mississippi Mills; they're going to the leader of the official opposition and asking him to continue to apply public pressure. And it has worked so far. We saw this with the transition rules on prepaid funerals; we saw this with the exemptions for Tim Hortons coffee and newspapers. But what we haven't seen is them standing up on behalf of their constituents and asking the finance minister and the Premier to come to their hometowns to explain to the people of this province why they want to put a $3-billion tax grab under their Christmas tree this year.

I look forward to hearing why they will not travel this province over a prolonged period of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to have a few minutes to respond to the member from Nepean–Carleton. I know that during question period things get a little noisy in this place and it's often more difficult to hear the responses that the Minister of Finance would have provided, so let me make an effort again.

First, let me say that the minister introduced, back during this fiscal year, before the end of March, a spring budget that included a comprehensive tax reform package, part of which was the HST. There are members throughout this Legislature, I can tell you, particularly on the government side, who have been meeting in their communities with community organizations, with business communities, with community associations, with municipalities, talking to the issue of and the concerns regarding and the opportunities that exist with the HST and the broader reform package.

So it's not as though this has come out of the blue somehow. The legislation that the minister has introduced just recently speaks to the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act. This will be, effectively, some implementing legislation that we are responsible to do, and the federal government will have to do something similar. But it's not as though this has just popped up out of the woodwork.

Let me tell you that the minister, during the context of putting together this package of tax reform and growth opportunities—it's going to result in some $15 billion in

tax cuts. Approximately $10.6 billion of those will be to Ontario individuals and their families and a further $4.5 billion will be for business. The minister said today, if it wasn't heard well, that those businesses are both on Main Street and Bay Street.

1810

This is the right plan at the right time for this province. The proposed HST and tax cuts will increase business investment within this province. It will create new jobs, it will result in a rise in incomes for families over time, and it will provide opportunities for reduced prices on many of the consumer products that people purchase.

This particular legislation and the HST are going to result in proposed income tax cuts, if the legislation passes. They will be permanent, and they will be for roughly 93% of taxpayers in this province. That's 93% who will see permanent cuts to their income tax. Approximately 90,000 low-income Ontarians will stop paying provincial income tax at all. I have to tell you, Speaker, that it has been the hallmark of this government over its terms in office to speak to those who are vulnerable in our community, and I can think of no better way to do that than ensuring that some 90,000 low-income Ontarians are no longer burdened with income tax when they can least afford to pay it.

I want to just take a few more moments in the two minutes we have left available to us to make a couple of other comments. We recognize that during this transitional phase, there will be need for some support. So in the negotiations with the federal government for a transfer to us, we're going to be providing some $1,000 to families in the province of Ontario and some $300 to individuals in the form of individual payments, and that will help with the transition. But not only that, those lower- and middle-income families will also see ongoing and permanent tax credits available to them, much like they have with the GST currently.

So we're protecting those that we have to protect within our communities. We are putting in place a structure and a strategy that will see income tax cuts broadly. Over time, we will see reductions in consumer prices for products, and we will see a much stronger and healthier economy.

As recently as the past week or so, Jack Mintz, who is the Palmer Chair in Public Policy at the University of Calgary, looked at the effects that the HST will have on the Ontario economy. In his review, within a 10-year period he feels our modernized tax system will result in over 590,000 net new jobs in this province and result in some $47 billion in investments here in Ontario.

In the minute or so that's left, to the benefit of the member from Nepean–Carleton and those members who remain with us this afternoon, I want to speak to a bit of the history from the Conservative governments and Conservative parties. The Tory federal finance minister, Jim Flaherty, said in his budget that the single sales tax "is the single most important step that provinces with RSTs could take to stimulate new business investment, create jobs and improve Canada's overall economic competitiveness." We have to work with and recognize what our federal counterparts are doing.

At the time when we were introducing our budget, the interim leader of the official opposition said, "I think, in theory, our party is supportive of harmonization."

Today, the opposition seems somewhat paralyzed in the face of hard choices and bold action. I'll refer to Minister Wilkinson's comment today, that they believe in the status quo: That would be status and quo. This is the party—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Finance. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the member for Pickering–Scarborough East will have up to five minutes to reply.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Looking over at the Liberal benches, I must wonder aloud. I was wondering who was going to respond on behalf of Minister Duncan to what I have to say.

This is the first time that I've ever asked for a late show in this House in over two years, because there's an element of frustration. At the same time, I should say that when I arrived here, I was told that if question period was meant to provide answers, it would be called answer period, so I take all of this with a grain of salt.

Having said that, members know that since we returned after the summer in early September, I have had a series of questions, probably at this point numbering in the dozens, on the question of the $81-million air conditioner, or, as Minister Duncan likes to call it, the Windsor Energy Centre. Now, let's put this into context: $81 million in the context of the province of Ontario, or in any context, is a heck of a lot of money. There was a national Liberal government that was defeated because of a scandal that involved $100 million called Adscam, so we're not talking about a paltry sum.

I asked some questions today that are not unlike questions I have put on the record before. What these all really come down to, at the end of the day, is something that this party in opposition deals an awful lot with, and that is the question of government accountability and the responsibility this government is supposed to take for its actions. The questions have basically revolved around why an energy centre was built, and I might say after the fact, in the first place, why this was not built in accordance with the original request for proposal, which was talked about and was bid out successfully to a company that responded to an RFP that said: "to design, to build, to commission, to own and to operate an energy centre." Then we discovered that what they've done is design and build; the "commission," "own" and "operate" have gone by the boards—why this was built off books in the first

place, in other words, never really budgeted at the time so that it could transparently be seen by the people of Ontario; why the original builder, who had proposed to buy it, did not buy it at a price that was perceived to be fair, and in fact even arbitrated; why this particular building, which houses equipment that's designed specifically to produce energy, does not produce any power whatsoever, but rather hot and cold air.

I've asked the minister whether it even works, whether it actually is that $81-million air conditioner or in fact a power station. I asked a number of questions along these lines, but very particularly and of late why, after the Premier announced that there would no longer be sole-sourced contracts—and this was a fairly substantial announcement made during the month of August by good cop, bad cop. One day the finance minister, disappointed in what had happened, particularly at OLG, was describing the energy centre, amongst other things, as a boil to be lanced, and the next day the Premier comes along and says we're not going to do sole-source contracts anymore. And here we are with an energy centre that's operated by H.H. Angus, which received this contract to operate, a sole-source contract, without going through any tendering process, and has been operating at the rate of $15,000 per day, open-ended for the past six weeks. I'm bothered by this.

So today I asked the Premier, who has yet to respond to my questions in this House, very directly a question, and I again got it punted to Minister Duncan. The Premier himself approximately 10 days ago held a media scrum at that very Windsor spot during the Liberal convention, in which he said that the lights had to stay on, when in fact we know that the lights in the energy centre are not a function of the energy centre because it doesn't produce any power. So I wanted to know what was going to be done about an energy centre that, in the latest chapter, we hear may be worth absolutely nothing. The people of Ontario, through me, get to ask these questions, and it's for the government to respond to them. It's that answer, that series of answers, that is sadly lacking, and the reason for my questions today and tonight. Perhaps I'll get something akin to an answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I appreciate the member from Thornhill and his presentation of four or five minutes and the fact that it is his first opportunity to engage in a late show by offering one up this evening in respect to his question to the Minister of Finance.

Let me first say, I know that on any given number of occasions members opposite will ask questions of the Premier, and it is certainly not only the Premier's prerogative, but I think to some extent an obligation, to refer those to the ministers who have jurisdiction for the matters beforehand because it's the ministers who carry those files and have responsibilities for those ministries. So it's not a surprise on this side, nor would it be a surprise on that side, when those referrals are made to those who probably would have the best opportunity, the best answers available, at that point in time.

There's no question that, as the Minister of Finance said today, there are a number of questions in regard to this issue. There are questions being raised by the minister, questions being raised just within cabinet and questions being raised on the opposite side of the House.

1820

Over the past half-dozen months or so, a number of steps have been taken in regard to this particular file. There have been changes at the very senior level of the executive and significant changes obviously in the board of directors, so the overall management is entirely changed.

Since that time, OLG has put in place a short-term interim operator at the Windsor Energy Centre. In addition to that, they have released a competitive RFP for a longer-term operator to be brought into play. This is going to obviously address the matter of the overall operations. There are still many, many outstanding questions. In fact, there is a court dispute. There's a commercial dispute between the OLG and the private company that was engaged in this process.

We know very well that this matter is currently before the courts, and I would suggest that it's certainly inappropriate for me in particular to be commenting more directly on any details of that dispute, and I very much expect that you would hear the same thing from the Minister of Finance in that regard.

I'm not going to take any more time than that this afternoon, save and except to try to reinforce the comments by the Minister of Finance. I said earlier that often in this place it's difficult to hear the responses in the heat of question period. Hopefully, this is at least helpful in some way to the member opposite.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question today from the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the member from Brant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise tonight. Like my colleague from Thornhill, I seldom ask for a late show, but today's question was so important in front of the Police Association of Ontario that I thought it was warranted to come in here and actually get some kind of an answer put more on the record.

It's really quite simple. I'm happy tonight that I'm joined by some of my colleagues here. I want to congratulate Mr. Arnott from Wellington for his contributions, particularly around his work towards getting approval for presumptive legislation for volunteer firefighters. I heard the parliamentary assistant today taking somewhat of a credit for that announcement, but we all know, on this side of the House at least, and most

of the firefighters in Ontario know that Mr. Arnott's private member's bill, along with the support of volunteer firefighters, finally humiliated the government into making an announcement after 30 months.

But the question today is quite simple. I asked the minister, "Are you satisfied that the director of the SIU, Mr. Ian Scott, is performing his job in an objective and non-biased manner?" He rambled on, talking about how wonderful the police were, and never did answer that part of the question. I think that's important, because I can tell you—I'm going to give you some quotes on why police officers are not satisfied with the special investigations unit.

Secondly, I asked the question, "Minister, if the director oversees the actions of the police, who oversees the actions of the director? And what is being done to correct this abuse of the power of this office?" I never got an answer to either one of those today. He rambled on about nothing. He was saying that he can't report on individual cases.

I've got some comments here from a number of people. Here's a comment that the director of the special investigations unit made in a press release that this unit put out on September 28: "Director Scott said, 'Beyond that, I am not sure what happened. There is no contemporaneous information of this incident such as civilian witnesses [or] audio or video recordings, and there were only three individuals at the scene: the now-deceased Mr. Schaeffer and the two officers. However, I cannot place sufficient reliance on the information provided by the officers to decide what probably happened." That doesn't sound like a very supportive quote to me from someone who's investigating the unit. It sounds actually quite biased, and I know that a number of police officers are concerned about that as well.

I also wanted to point out that the police leader—I got a letter sent to the Attorney General's office from the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, Mr. Daniel Parkinson. Quite frankly, he says, "It is in this context that we find Mr. Scott's comments unhelpful. To lead the reporter in the article in question to conclude that, 'officers are being given an opportunity to collude and conceal damning evidence in criminal investigations' is, frankly, outrageous. As a lawyer and officer of the crown, Mr. Scott seems to fail to acknowledge the basic rights of our officers to legal counsel under collective bargaining agreements, the Police Services Act, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

Many, many police officers, the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, the chief of police of the city of Toronto, the Toronto Police Services Board—many organizations are very, very dissatisfied with what we call "non-biased" in this director's position. As we move forward, I would like to see these kinds of answers resolved. I don't think it's nice to have the people who guard our property and whom we have so much respect for being treated in a biased manner, and that's what I think is happening today in this special investigations unit led by Mr. Ian Scott.

I know that the parliamentary assistant will have some comments to sort of deflect what I am saying, but the reality is that we on this side of the House are very, very supportive of the police services in the province of Ontario. They're downstairs right now at their lobby reception, and we'll be going down there very shortly to join them. But I can tell you that I work with police officers on a daily basis, on a yearly basis, and I hear almost no comments, no concerns about them, and I don't think that an office like the special investigations unit, a body of this government, should be looking at them in a biased manner. I certainly think, when it comes to answering questions in this House on a subject as important as the question I asked today, I should get a reasonable and responsible and committed answer from the person responsible for the police services in the province of Ontario, that being the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Brant has up to five minutes to reply.

Mr. Dave Levac: I start with a puzzled look on my face in terms of the beginning of the honourable member's diatribe, about whether or not he has a monopoly on liking police. But let me back up to the comment that he made about me trying to take credit for presumptive legislation for the volunteer firefighters. Since 1999 I've been brought into that position, and I started to move that forward; it started with me being in opposition and the government of the day denying it. So if he wants to say that someone else didn't get credit, he needs to re-read the statement, in which I said that all members on all sides of the House deserve credit for working towards getting this particular piece of legislation. So it's unfair and unfortunate that he chose to try to pin me with taking a boastful attitude toward presumptive legislation, when it was done particularly for the good of the volunteer firefighters of our province. It's unfortunate. It really is unfortunate.

Then he also starts in—and I find it rather curiously intriguing that during the lobby day of the PAO this member decides to ask a question of the government in terms of an arm's-length, independent agency that investigates the circumstances involving police and civilians that have resulted in a serious injury or a death, and that it has its authority performed under the Police Services Act. Under those circumstances, what I curiously understand is that the SIU has been undergoing change and metamorphosing, because when it was with the previous government, nobody liked it. Where was his passion for the police officers at that time, I wonder.

What we have now is a person who is asking a question during police lobby day, appropriately filled with police officers who have concerns about a certain agency. So let me put his mind to rest in terms of the monopoly that he takes credit for, as being the only ones who really like police officers.

What we have done in policing and for police officers in Ontario is, we have invested $37 million annually for

our new officers program. And by the way, the previous government's foray into hiring 1,000 new officers stopped in year five and we had to pick up the costs to continue it and include another 1,000 officers. Let's talk about whether or not there's a universal acceptance in this House, which I've been trying to portray both on the firefighting side and on the police side, that no one has a monopoly on how one treats the firefighters and police officers in the province of Ontario. It's really unfortunate to air these kinds of platitudes during a lobby day, in the middle of politics—that you would say that the SIU is in dire straits. Quite frankly, there are conversations that are ongoing that deserve attention and that will get attention.

As I said earlier, before the Leader of the Opposition presented us with a political whack in an attempt to get a motion passed in this House that basically says, "Politically, we scratch you, and you are not looking good," what we should be doing is celebrating the police officers in the province of Ontario without the political garbage, without the political noise, without the political nuances to try to score points again, and start talking about how we make the place better—not just this place, but firefighting and police officers in the province of Ontario.

So, to answer the question quickly and in a simplistic way, the SIU is part of the whole system that gets evaluated on an ongoing basis, as do the police officers who come to us today and every year to look at issues they need to put before us, so that we, as a government, and we, as a House, can enter into debates about how we can improve policing in the province of Ontario.

Is SIU part of that process? Yes, it is. Will we continue to dialogue, continue to debate and continue to work with all stakeholders—not, conveniently, just the PAO today—to see if we can design the best system that we can?

As I've said time and time again in this House, it's a fluid place and we can have an opportunity to continue to improve, and as we do that, the invitation and the hand out has always gone to the opposition to say, "What else can we do to make this a better place?" They've offered amendments. They offered the little political trick today. It got turned down.

So what do we do? We continue to move forward and ask, are we evaluating those systems that keep us safe and secure? The short answer is yes, and we've made some changes and some modifications to show that.

Quite frankly, the answer that is deserved is one that I just gave.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1832.

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Nº 188

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 18 November 2009

Mercredi 18 novembre 2009

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Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 18 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 18 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the nondenominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOOD GOVERNMENT ACT, 2009
LOI DE 2009 SUR LA SAINE GESTION PUBLIQUE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 4, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts / Projet de loi 212, Loi visant à promouvoir une saine gestion publique en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois et en édictant deux nouvelles lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 2009, I am now required to put the question.

On October 27, Mr. Bentley moved second reading of Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Second reading agreed to.

ANIMAL HEALTH ACT, 2009
LOI DE 2009 SUR LA SANTÉ ANIMALE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 4, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 204, An Act to protect animal health and to amend and repeal other Acts / Projet de loi 204, Loi protégeant la santé animale et modifiant et abrogeant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 2009, I am now required to put the question.

On October 5, Mrs. Dombrowsky moved second reading of Bill 204, An Act to protect animal health and to amend and repeal other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Second reading agreed to.

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000, and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on General Government; and

That the vote on second reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet during its normal meeting times on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and on Monday, November 30, 2009, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Friday, November 27, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Monday, November 30, 2009, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, December 1, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion 143. Debate? The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This is kind of funny. Here we are with another time allocation motion. The government clearly has decided—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Exactly; it's so early in the morning.

Anyway, I find it interesting that governments are more and more inclined, nowadays, to use time allocation motions as a way of being able to move legislation through the House. I find that, frankly, quite regrettable. I think there has been a tradition in this House over the years, especially under the old rules, where members had more of an ability to have some independent power in this Legislature to hold governments up, and it forced the parties to work together in order to basically decide how the business of the House would go through so that the government could get its business through, but at the same time, the concerns of not only the opposition but of the public could be heard and dealt with and, at times, incorporated into amendments to legislation that the government was bringing through.

It's pretty clear what is going to be happening for the next three and a half weeks until we break for Christmas: The government has decided that it is going to time-allocate pretty well everything. We're going to have minimal debates at second reading. We're going to do what the new standing orders call for, which is six hours of debate, and when six hours of debate is done, the government is going to move on time allocation with absolutely everything. It beckons the question: What are the role of this House? What is the role of opposition members and what is the role of government members when it comes to due diligence in making sure that legislation that is brought forward by the government is scrutinized in some way to make sure it does what it's supposed to do?

Now, I know the government backbenchers have busy things to do. They've got to run home and deal with all the protests in regard to the HST, the harmonized sales tax, and they don't have time to worry their heads over legislation in the House. But I do have to say, after being here for 20-some-odd years, and I know my good friend Mr. Bradley, who has been here far longer than I—he is the dean of the House—would understand, that governments of all stripes have introduced legislation in this place that has been flawed, and governments of all stripes have had to go back and amend legislation as a result of bills not being drafted right in the first place.

I think back to the time of Mike Harris, if we remember the fight—at that time, Mr. Bradley and I were in opposition together—when the government decided it was going to make changes to the Municipal Act. Our NDP government had made some pretty sweeping changes to the Municipal Act to deal with some of the issues we thought were important, and the mantra of the Conservative government was to undo all that and basically limit people's ability to really have a say in what happened when it came to planning in their municipalities. So the government had an ideological bill that was introduced in, I think, 1996. The bill was about this thick, and at that time, I was the municipal affairs critic and charged with reading that bill and being part of the committee process.

I remember our going out on the road. I remember, in second reading—let's not even talk about the road. I remember being at second reading and saying to the government of the day—Al Leach was the minister, if I remember correctly—"Well, look at this particular section of your act. It doesn't even do what you ask it to do. I don't agree with where you're going, but at least you should write the legislation in some way that it makes some sense," because they had picked the worst possible of both worlds by, first of all, changing the legislation from what it was before, and then they were trying to change it for something else that they wanted. But they didn't even get that right because the legislation was improperly drafted, and as a result, it did not do either. It didn't deal with what was in the past as far as the changes, and it certainly didn't deal with what the government wanted in the future.

0910

We went out on committee hearings across this province. Back then, it used to be that bills would go into committee in the intersession and the members of the public had an opportunity to come forward. Municipality after municipality, and clerk after clerk and environmental groups and others who were interested came before the committee and said, "Not only is this bill false as far as where it's going, but it's not drafted properly."

I remember myself, and I forget who the Liberal members were on that committee with me, saying to the government, "Well, your bill isn't even properly drafted." So we went to clause-by-clause, and then we tried to change the bill as far as doing amendments in the clause-by-clause portion. The government said, "No, you guys don't know what you're talking about." The opposition members didn't want to take our advice, and the government members just did what good backbenchers do in the government. "If the parliamentary assistant or the minister says that's what it is, well, that's what it is. Why worry myself with the details? That would just clutter up things up in my mind too much," say the backbenchers of the government. As a result of that, they passed the legislation at third reading, and we ended up

with a bill that then had to be brought back to the House seven times in order to try to fix the problems with that particular act.

My point to the government House leader is, this is very clever. Here you are with yet another time allocation motion. Oh, I'm sure that the House leader for the government side is very happy and very proud of herself and goes to cabinet and says, "Don't worry, Dalton and the rest of my colleagues, I'm not going to allow that pesky opposition to hold anything up, and I will make sure we get all of our legislation in before Christmas so that we can all go home and sleep very, very nicely on Christmas Eve."

I just say to the government: It's a fault; it's not the way that legislation should be done. We're going to have time allocation on pretty well everything you've got. You're not going to allow proper committee hearings on any of this legislation. The public is going to be excluded.

The last time I checked, we lived in a democracy. The people of Ontario have a right to have their say when it comes to what a government is doing. Some people may come to committee and actually agree with you. Some people may come to committee and disagree with you. But the point is, that's the beauty of it. That's what democracy is all about.

I use as an example one of the bills that is currently in committee, which I'm pretty sure was time-allocated. That is the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act—changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The government wanted, on the subcommittee, to basically have—no, I guess it was not time-allocated, because the committee was dealing with that particular issue. So I take that back. It wasn't time-allocated, but it makes my point nonetheless. The position I took on the subcommittee was, let's do the advertising to find out who's interested in being able to speak to that bill, and then, once they have written to the clerk of the committee and said, "I want to present and I want standing to make presentation on the bill," we'll determine how many people we've got and we'll determine from that how many days of committee hearings we should have.

Now, we've done that in the past where you've had five or 10 people across Ontario who wanted to speak to a bill. Therefore, we accommodate that with one day of hearings here in Toronto—pretty easy to do. But in this particular case, we had over 80 individuals and groups who indicated that they wanted to come and present on this bill. We said to the government on the subcommittee: "No, it's not good enough just to have one or two days of hearing. It's clear that the public wants to have its say on this bill. We've had a lot of people"—and not at the prodding of the opposition or the government; these were just people who were paying attention to what's going on in this Legislature—"over 80 individuals and groups, apply to come and present on that bill before the committee." And the government said, "No, and rather than use time allocation, we're going to use our majority on the committee in order to kill the public hearings," so that there were limited public hearings and we got to hear from maybe a tenth—or a little bit more than a tenth—of those who actually said that they wanted to present to this committee.

So I say to the government House leader: Bully for you. You're getting your legislation through. It's wonderful. It's great. You can stand and crow at the cabinet table and tell Dalton just how efficient you are. But it's not very imaginative, and it's not very democratic. It's not very imaginative in the sense that the standing orders have been changed and you have the ability to time-allocate everything after six hours. So it's no great feat, no great strategy that the government House leader has; she is using the changed standing orders to time-allocate all the bills. And from the democratic side, I think it really is a disservice to the public of Ontario.

I would propose the following to the government House leader: If the government House leader has certain bills that she wants to have passed before Christmas, then tell us what those bills are—I know the government House leader is going to say, "Well, I'm telling you." Of course the opposition is going to have some difficulty with some of your bills. Ours happens to be around the issue of the omnibus bill and, obviously, around the HST bill. Those are the two we're going to have a problem with—I can't speak for the Conservatives. But you have a host of other pieces of legislation that you want to have passed. I would argue that you probably have somewhere in the neighbourhood of 10 or 15 bills on the order paper that you are pretty interested in getting passed before Christmas.

I would argue that we probably can agree to do that on some of those other bills. Because the demand for public hearings at committee has not been great on some of those bills, we could have agreed to have a day of committee during the session here at Queen's Park, allow people to present here in Toronto or via teleconference to have their say, and then do clause-by-clause and move forward for third reading before Christmas. I think it could have been done. With the co-operation of the government House leader and the opposition House leaders, myself and Mr. Runciman—I am acting as House leader at this particular time—the government could have very simply had a majority of its legislation passed without a heck of a lot of problems. But yes, you would have had to have public scrutiny on two bills.

Here's the point: If the government says, "Our signature piece this fall session is to harmonize the GST," is it a bad thing to allow that to go to committee in the intersession and have it passed at the beginning of the spring session? It would be done in time for July 1; the government would get its bill. We understand that the parliamentary principle is very simple: Yes, a majority government has to get its bills passed in the end; we understand that. But, yes, the opposition has a role to scrutinize that legislation.

I say to the government House leader: Along the way, yes, we would demand that the HST bill travel during the intersession to a number of communities around Ontario.

Obviously we want more communities; you would want fewer communities. Nonetheless there has got to be a compromise somewhere, and we, as the opposition, would have been able to hold up to scrutiny both the HST bill and the omnibus bill, which is the other one we would want to go out to committee, and the public would have its say.

I say to the government: What are you afraid of? I've heard the Premier and the finance minister on numerous occasions in this House say how proud they are to introduce this HST legislation, how great it is and how the HST is going to be the best thing since sliced bread for the Ontario economy. If that's the case, send it out to committee. Allow the public to have its say. Defend yourself before the public. What's scary about that? Are you afraid to talk to the public about your legislation?

Yes, of course you're going to get some people coming to committee who will be opposed, but you're also going to get people who will come to committee and see it your way. Mr. Drummond from the TD Bank and others, I'm sure, would come before the committee and say some of the things they've said in order to bolster the government in its attempt to harmonize the GST and the PST.

What does the government decide? They are going to time-allocate. You know what's going to happen with the HST bill: We're going to start debate here on Thursday and end up with six hours of debate sometime probably next week, the government is going to bring a time allocation motion into the House, as we have today, and is going to push that bill by way of time allocation with hardly any hearings here, because the reality is that after next week, there are only two more weeks of sittings of the House. So the public is going to have, at best, one or maybe two days to have their say on harmonization of the GST and the PST, and that will be it.

0920

I'm just saying to the government across the way that if in fact you're—I need my glasses to read notes; I'm very sorry. I would say to my friend the government House leader that you're going to basically give the public very little time to move on the issue of being able to have their say on the HST. You think you're clever by moving this time allocation motion. It is not, I think, reflective of what this House is all about and the good we can do in this House when it comes to doing the public's business.

Yes, democracy is messy. Yes, democracy means that people have to have their say. And yes, democracy means that at times people will disagree with you. But that's the beauty of the system. And when we can't get democracy right in this Legislature, how then can we go to the public in Ontario and say to them, "Oh, democracy is important. We stand for it"? This House is becoming less and less democratic as the rules are changed. Government House leader after government House leader has become less and less democratic as they start to utilize those new rules under the standing orders. I don't think that at the end of the day it serves anybody well.

To the government on the issue of the HST: If you're proud about what you're doing and you think it's the right thing, bring your case to the people by way of committee—the public in places like Sudbury and Toronto and maybe Ottawa or Timmins, or wherever else we might be going; you name it. At the end, the public can have their say. Then, if you disagree with them, you can enter dialogue at committee in order to try to convince them that maybe you're doing the right thing. But basically truncating the process by way of time allocation I would say is not exactly a very good thing. In fact, what it's going to lead to, I think, is a system where, quite frankly, we don't give the kind of scrutiny to bills that we should be giving.

On the issue of the time allocation specifically of this bill, the TSSA amendment act, Bill 187, there are some people that obviously aren't in support of this bill. I recognize that. This bill is in response to what has happened—the tragedy of the propane fire that happened here in Toronto—and the government wants to be seen as responding to what was a really unfortunate circumstance which, possibly with improper training, with equipment that may not have been as well maintained as it should have been and safety procedures not as clear as they could have been, resulted in the deaths of individuals and the destruction of property and the terrorizing of people living near that propane plant. So the government has this bill.

Again, why does it need to be time-allocated? The government knew it had this bill this fall. The government introduced this bill for second reading. We could have allowed some public hearings to happen by way of allowing people to have their say. The government has decided, no, it's going to limit that by way of a time allocation motion. We don't know. There may be five people that want to speak to this bill; there may be 50 people that want to speak to this bill at second reading.

I just say to the government across the way that if you think that for some reason you're being clever by using time allocation, all you're really doing is limiting the ability of the public to do what's right when it comes to being involved in the process.

Really, I'm very disappointed that the government has moved in this way. I would hope that the government would return to what we used to do in this House at one time, and that was where the parties would sit down at the House leaders' meetings once a week, along with the whips, and there'd be a discussion about what the government absolutely needed for the end of the session. The opposition would then table, "All right, here's what it is that we would like to have as far as time in the House for debate and committee hearings." It forces us, as the opposition, to pick and choose so that we don't basically talk out every bill but allow certain bills to go forward fast because there's general agreement, and for other bills that we have more of a disagreement with, we're able to basically have the proper amount of time in order to discuss those bills. I just say to the government that you're not serving the public well, and I think you're not serving the Legislature well.

With that, I would like the government to reflect on that and I would call for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bisson has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0925 to 0955.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bisson has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

Take your seats, please.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 20; the nays are 29.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As I was saying, the government House leader is thinking that she's done a very smart thing by moving time allocation on yet another bill. At the end of the day, what the government is doing is not all that clever. What it does is take away the ability of the public to have their say when it comes to what these bills are all about and to give the bills the type of scrutiny that they need in order to make sure that the legislation does what it's supposed to do at the end of the day. So I just say to the government across the way—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just a second. Could the members, if you're leaving, leave quietly, and if you're remaining, listen quietly? Thank you.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As I was saying to the government House leader, in the end we know that there would have been some sort of trade-off. That's the way this place is supposed to work. The government should have put forward what bills it wants—and absolutely needs—before Christmas. Obviously there would be some disagreement about that. The opposition would say that we want particular bills to be held over into the intersession. I know that for our party, it would have been the tax harmonization bill and the omnibus bill.

But as I said earlier, if the government is so proud of these two bills, if they think they're such great pieces of legislation and that there's such a public outcry to support these bills, then why not send them out to committee? If they're that afraid—I take it that is the reason why they're not doing it.

So I just say that it's a sad, sad day in this Legislature when government House leaders return constantly, after the six hours, as they're allowed to under the standing orders, to time-allocate absolutely everything.

I would like to see what other members have to say on this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sorry; I was distracted while talking with one of the pages. You're done? Further debate?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I don't know. I said I was distracted. I didn't hear what you said, so could you please repeat it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, normally when a member is finished his speech and he sits down, it goes to the next member. I was just finished.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's all I needed to know. Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I was going to say, as I usually do, that I'm pleased to be able to speak on a particular piece of legislation, because I regard that as one of the fundamental responsibilities I have as a member of the Legislature, but I find myself in the position of having to rephrase that opening comment because we're dealing with a time allocation motion today. I think that it's very unfortunate that we find ourselves yet again in the position of a time allocation motion.

I should also explain to people who are watching what this really means. It might appear sometimes to those who watch that decision-making is very slow in the democratic process. I believe there's a reason for that, and the reason is very simple: In a modern democracy, it's very important to move along in a measured way that allows for people to understand what you are contemplating in legislation. And it's in that kind of a context, then, that the imposition of a time limit on a piece of legislation flies in the face of that kind of judicious process.

1000

In this particular case, what we are being asked to do is look at shortening our opportunity by the fact that the order tells us that the Standing Committee on General Government would be authorized to meet during its normal meeting times on Wednesday, November 25 for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and on Monday, November 30 for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. What that really means is that the opportunity for anyone in the general public to be able to come forward and express support or concerns or ideas for amendments will have—and I'm just doing this as a ballpark—no more than three hours. When you consider the importance of this particular bill, it certainly seems to me, and I'm sure to all other reasonable people, that this kind of consideration of a bill in that public forum is extremely limited. It really is no more than a nod to the process, I would argue, a nod that says, "Okay, we've had a public hearing," but certainly nothing that would generate opportunity for people to be able to either come and participate or even to be able to come and hear what issues have come forward within the public mind on this particular piece of legislation.

It's really an interesting contrast because there were a number of occasions in the previous government, of which I was a member, where we actually sent bills out after first reading and had the opportunity to develop a

consensus with people in general on particular bills. While this government has not ever, in its term of office, offered the public that opportunity, this seems to be going to the opposite extreme in terms of the opportunity for hearings. The fact that debate on the bill is now very much limited—let me just go back to the order as it appears here, and that is, that after the clause-by-clause consideration—and by the way, any amendments or any changes will have been deemed to have been made. Finally, at a point, the bill will be ordered for third reading, and at third reading, "one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties." Basically, one hour means that each party has approximately 20 minutes to make any references to this particular bill.

I think it's really important to look, as I will for a few moments, at the complexity of the bill and some of the issues that, quite frankly, I think deserve more than this lip service of one afternoon. I think that I'd look at particular issues around the recommendations that are contained within the bill. There are a few of them, if I can find the right page. One of them deals with the need for the Technical Standards and Safety Authority to have a chief risk and safety officer independent of the TSSA to report annually on how the TSSA is meeting its public safety mandate.

Again, I know that if we were to have fulsome public hearings, there would be much interest in this process. Frankly, it deserves public comment. The whole issue of risk assessment and establishing criteria for safety is obviously an extremely important process.

The other issues are: giving the minister the power to issue policy directives to the TSSA—again, something upon which there are, I know, many people who have concerns about the TSSA, its mandate, its relationship with the government, the notion of oversight. There are many, many issues that come to the public mind on this particular issue.

Another part of the bill would allow the Auditor General to access TSSA records. This is, I think, a departure that, again, deserves more fulsome conversation because it would be, as I understand it, the first time the Auditor General would be looking at an organization that is using private money as opposed to public money. What we're saying that this bill contemplates is allowing the Auditor General to oversee, within the means of his mandate, the finances of the TSSA, which is, as I say, private money.

The other thing about the bill is that it also exposes some of the problems that the TSSA has within its own membership and within its own mandate. There are many, as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has maintained, who will have significant suggestions for reform of the TSSA, and they identify issues such as the broad mandate of the TSSA and its need to moderate its growth mentality. It has expanded its mandate, and obviously with that goes the fee structure, and the membership of course are the payers of this fee increase.

These are important questions for everyone to understand who is affected by the TSSA.

There is no one who is suggesting that an organization such as this shouldn't exist. Everybody appreciates the fact that with these kinds of safety standards, there's some comfort from the point of view of the consumer as well as the manufacturer or the vendor because of the fact that with that kind of stamp of approval, if you like, it creates a level playing field for the manufacturers and the vendors and it also creates confidence in the minds of the consumers.

It's absolutely critical that an organization such as this should exist, but it's also critical that those people in the membership who are impacted by this in a very direct way need to have the opportunity to raise their voices and offer suggestions to the government, and that's essentially what is missing by having a time allocation motion.

One of the problems that, again, comes up with time allocation, is that there may be many who wish to try to be squeezed into that very narrow time frame. Even if you have four an hour and you have three hours, you've talked to 12 groups. I don't think that is a fair process for people for whom this legislation is going to have such an important impact.

It's because of those kinds of issues that I think the government is making a big mistake in not allowing further discussion and not allowing for further hearings. If you've taken all this time to have a piece of legislation and you have not done the proper consultation and allowed people to voice their concerns, then, in fact, you're going to deal with an unsatisfactory piece of legislation and certainly dissatisfied participants in the process.

It's on that basis that I am proposing that the motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996, be amended as follows:

By deleting the third paragraph and replacing it with: "That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet as follows: on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, in Toronto, on Monday, December 14, 2009, in Ottawa, and on Tuesday, December 15, 2009, in London for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and on January 13 and January 20, 2010, during its regular meeting times, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill";

In the fourth paragraph by deleting "Friday, November 27, 2009" and replacing it with "Monday, January 11, 2010";

In the fifth paragraph by deleting "Tuesday, December 1, 2009" and replacing it with "February 16, 2010"; and

In the seventh paragraph by deleting "one hour" and replacing it with "six hours."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Munro has moved an amendment that the motion by the government House leader with respect to Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996, be amended as follows:

By deleting the third paragraph and replacing it with: "That the Standing Committee on General Government

be authorized to meet as follows: on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, in Toronto, on Monday, December 14, 2009, in Ottawa, and on Tuesday, December 15, 2009, in London for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and on January 13 and January 20, 2010, during its regular meeting times, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill";

In the fourth paragraph by deleting "Friday, November 27, 2009" and replacing it with "Monday, January 11, 2010";

In the fifth paragraph by deleting "Tuesday, December 1, 2009" and replacing it with "February 16, 2010"; and

In the seventh paragraph by deleting "one hour" and replacing it with "six hours."

It being 10:15 of the clock, pursuant to standing order 8, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to introduce Leah Ciurko of Orangeville. She's here today with the University of Waterloo Women in House program, so I trust we will be on our best behaviour.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In the west members' gallery I'd like to introduce Melissa Baluk from the University of Waterloo. She's a third-year student majoring in speech communication, and she's looking forward to some interesting rhetorical flourishes this morning.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce two friends of mine in the opposition gallery, Mr. Les Armstrong and Mr. George Fortin, and welcome them to the Legislature today.

Mr. Paul Miller: In the west gallery, I'd like to introduce Milan Stanekovic and Zohra Stanekovic—they're visiting from Serbia—and also Danica Milojevic, who is from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce my friends Mr. Zahedi and Mr. Bayat, in the west gallery.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like to introduce Gary and Liz Carlson, constituents of mine from the city of Orillia. They're here today for lunch and a visit to Queen's Park.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'm really pleased to introduce Athena Ngai. She's a University of Waterloo first-year student and she is with us here today with the Women in House program at the University of Waterloo.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I don't think they've joined us yet, but today we'll be joined by the Mully Children's Family Choir from Kenya, who will be singing for us on the steps at noon.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd also like to introduce and welcome Laura Holland, also from the University of Waterloo, shadowing me today. Welcome.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I would like to introduce Alisha Preston, also from the University of Waterloo women-in-government program.

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce Ashley Laurin, also from the University of Waterloo MA program for women in government. She'll be following me and shadowing with me today.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm really proud to introduce a number of people from my riding. First, I want to introduce Erin McKee and Wendy McKee. Erin is a student and was quite interested in seeing how we conduct ourselves in the House. I told her to come up here and see first-hand.

As well, I want to introduce two other people. One is Ingrid Balinski. She's a godmother extraordinaire and a friend of Corina Fansolato, who is the mother of page Alana Fansolato. I'd like to welcome her here to the House as well.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to welcome today, from the University of Waterloo women-in-government program, Anya Lomako.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is my pleasure to introduce Melissa Cernigoy, who's also a student at University of Waterloo in the Women in House program. Welcome.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to recognize the National Trades Contractors Coalition, who are in the gallery here and their president, Richard McKeagan. Welcome.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to also introduce Anika, who is not only part of the University of Waterloo program but also a constituent of mine. And I'd like to echo the sentiments made by the member for Durham: We are very pleased to have the National Trade Contractors Coalition of Canada and their wonderful breakfast meeting here this morning.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to introduce and welcome the students from John Ross Robertson school in my riding. As you know, Mr. Speaker, they even have some of your relatives attending that school. It's one of the finest in Canada. I'd like to welcome them here.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would like to introduce my friend Jeff Duncan, who resides in the town of Erin, who's joined us in the visitors' gallery. Welcome, Jeff.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like all members to join me in welcoming, in the west members' gallery, Ron Johnson, former member from Brantford, from the 36th Parliament. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 71(c)—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 71(c), Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has filed notice of a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. The order for second reading of Bill 218 therefore may not be called today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On October 26, Premier, the Minister of Health said that the cost of the sole-source contract to government handed to McKinsey was $750,000, but McKinsey is reported not to accept retainers of under $1 million. We recalled how the McGuinty Liberals tried to funnel the salary of Ron Sapsford and other health executives through hospital budgets, until they got caught. So we called around to see if they pulled the same trick. The Sudbury hospital says they have something for us, but they're waiting for direction to release information.

Premier, why are you making the Sudbury hospital divert from care to pay for the McKinsey deal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't speak to the particulars of this. What I can say is what I know. First of all, there was a practice in place with respect to paying some of the folks who work within the Ministry of Health through hospitals. That was a practice that's been in place for a number of years, under different governments, and we have decided to put a stop to that practice.

Secondly, I can say that when it comes to consultants, we've made a change in Ontario. Again, that was a practice, and this changes a practice that's been in place for a long, long time as well. We're now requiring, when it comes to consultants, that they no longer have the sole-source contracts. There has to be a competitive bidding process in place before consultants can access those contracts.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On and on it goes. You'd think that after eHealth, the McGuinty Liberals would have learned their lesson and try to stop treating the health care budget like it's their own little slush fund. But they're so out of touch with Ontario taxpayers that they boast more about paying more for health care, as if paying more and getting more were the same thing. With Canada's worst government, Ontarians pay more and get less. Ontario deserves better.

Premier, why are you making hospitals divert from health care to pay for your consultants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague I know is very much aware that there have been dramatic investments in Ontario hospitals in the course of the past six years; I believe, over 30%. In fact, they closed hospitals. We're building new hospitals, we're expanding existing hospitals, we're investing in more MRIs and CTs, we're hiring, we've built a new medical school, we're now graduating more doctors and we've hired thousands more nurses, and 800,000 more Ontarians now have access to family care than had before.

There's always more work to be done but I think, in fairness, we should acknowledge the progress that, together, we've made.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: We've heard that lessons have been learned, but apparently not. Now, instead of forcing eHealth to pay for the consultants, they're making hospitals pay for their sweetheart deals. This is why the public needs to hear from Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson to find out what has been going on and how the Premier and his staff operate. But the Premier is blocking a public inquiry that we've been suggesting, and the McGuinty Liberals are doing everything they can to keep their secrets.

Premier, is it true that your members have been ordered to shut down the public accounts committee this afternoon into the eHealth scandal?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague and her party are nothing if not relentless on this score, but I'll tell you why they are mistaken. They believe that there are party politics involved, and I can understand where they're coming from on this. But they are wrong-headed.

The auditor specifically said, in his report, "We were aware of the allegations that 'party politics' may have entered into the awarding of contracts ... but we saw no evidence of this during our work." Later on, when he was asked about this by a reporter, he added the following: "We told our staff, 'Keep your eyes open. If you see anything that doesn't pass the smell test'—and we saw lots with respect to favouritism, sole-sourcing, contract extensions, but we didn't see anything that would indicate there was any party politics." There has been a conclusive finding from the auditor. I think we should accept and respect every part of his report.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Premier of Ontario: Why are the Liberals exempting Timbits at the expense of doctors, who are going to be forced to pay 8% more on medical supplies, medical journals, hydro, legal fees and accounting fees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is talking about our plan to create 600,000 more jobs in the course of the next 10 years. My honourable colleague and her party are staunch defenders of the status quo. They're clinging to a past economy which is not coming back. Ontarians in their heart of hearts understand that. They know that there's an old world and a new world. They understand we have to build a stronger economy and they understand that involves making some changes. They understand that our plan is going to create 600,000 more jobs. What they can't understand is why the opposition will get in the way of 600,000 more jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Let me invite the Premier into our real world in Ontario, present-day. When we asked the Ministry of Finance officials to explain how the HST will impact the cost of health care, they said they didn't know. You haven't even thought about it, so that's why you should consult everyday Ontarians who are concerned about this. The Coalition of Family Physicians

understands what the HST will do to them, and that's why the McGuinty Liberals are in such a rush to bring it in. They say—I'm going to quote them: "The government, after all, must somehow pay for its irresponsible eHealth spending, and is therefore unilaterally postponing our fee increase while increasing our practice costs." I need to know: Is the HST going to result in increased doctor fees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to take the opportunity once again to thank Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty for their support in this regard. I want to acknowledge the support of both our food banks and our—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There's nothing wrong with having a bit of fun in here from time to time.

I want to acknowledge as well the support of both our food banks and our business groups, economists like Hugh Mackenzie and Jack Mintz, newspapers like the Toronto Star and the National Post. I want to acknowledge a consensus growing ever wider that this is the most important thing we can do together to secure a bright future for our kids and make sure we have the capacity to support our schools, support our health care and have in place, at all times, measures to support our vulnerable. This is about building a brighter future—600,000 more jobs.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I certainly hope you didn't pay $25,000 for those speaking points. With the McGuinty Liberals it's only a matter of time before the scandals that they have created are going to take their entire front bench, and the HST vote will cost them their entire back bench, because Canada's worst government should have the courage—they should learn to listen to more people than Jason Grier and Karli Farrow and the other Liberal friends they have hired. You need to face the public in communities right across the province. You need to talk to families and their doctors in Cornwall, in Kingston, in North Bay, in Kenora, in Windsor and in London North Centre. Right across the province they should have a say in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history. Why are you refusing to consult with doctors and the public on how much the HST will cost the health care system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague will want to acknowledge that the package of tax reforms will cost us over $3 billion over the course of the first four years. That's a net cost to the treasury.

I know that she's also going to want to acknowledge at some point in time that they are devoid of ideas when it comes to strengthening this economy and creating more jobs. They tell us that they don't like our package of tax reforms, a package that will, effective January 1 of this year, result in cuts to personal income taxes for 93% of Ontarians. They're against our plan to reduce taxes for our large businesses—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I was just running through a lengthy list of what the opposition stands against. It's easy to stand against these kinds of things, although it's sometimes difficult to understand.

They're against the personal income tax cuts. They're against the cuts for big business and small business. They're against the HST. But they have no plan of their own to create a single job, let alone our plan to create 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians.

We have a plan. They have partisanship. I think Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The McGuinty government is able to tell Ontarians exactly how much each HST exemption will cost the treasury: $20 million for diapers; $65 million for newspapers; $260 million for coffee and fast food. But what about the big-ticket items that aren't exempt? Can the Premier tell us today how much the new 8% tax on gas and hydro will cost Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It will result in an increase. We've been very clear about that from the outset. That's why we've worked hard to offset those increases with a number of things that we're doing.

For one thing, again, I would ask my honourable colleague to acknowledge the personal income tax cut that takes effect January 1 of this coming year, and I hope to have her support in connection with the bill in that regard. Beyond that, we're also taking 90,000 people in Ontario out from paying any income taxes at all. We also have a new tax credit in place of $260 per individual in our low-income families. Those are the kinds of things that are going to help to offset some of the additional costs.

Having said that, I know that my honourable colleague is actually intent, in her heart of hearts, on finding a way for us to move forward and have the capacity to support our hospitals, our schools and our most vulnerable. She wants to build a stronger economy. It's just that she doesn't have a plan of her own.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's interesting: The Premier said a heck of a lot, but he didn't tell us what that cost will be for gas and hydro, and that was the question.

It's not surprising that the Premier can't come up with a straight answer on that really basic question. We submitted a freedom-of-information request to find out exactly how much the new tax on gas and hydro is going to cost consumers. The Ministry of Finance says it has the numbers but it won't share them, claiming that the information may threaten the economic interests of Ontario.

Does the Premier really think that telling people how much the new tax on gas and hydro is going to cost them is actually a state secret?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm glad, now that the bill has been introduced in this Legislature, that the debate has been formally joined and the lines have been drawn.

I think the issue has become very clear. We have a plan on this side of the House to create 600,000 more jobs over the course of the next 10 years; they stand against it. We have a plan to reduce personal income taxes; they stand against this. We're reducing corporate taxes for big and small businesses alike; they stand against this.

The people of Ontario know what we stand for and what the opposition stands against. What they really want to know now is, knowing what we stand for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier, you have 10 seconds left.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you, Speaker. I'm good.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You know what? It is actually ridiculous that the government is hiding the numbers. This has less to do with the economic interests of Ontario and more to do with the political interests of this Liberal government.

Ontario families deserve to know exactly how much the new tax on gas and hydro is going to cost them, but this government simply refuses to tell them, just like it refuses to listen to them.

Rather than running for cover, the Premier now has a chance to come clean. Why won't he tell Ontario families exactly how much the new tax on gas and hydro is actually going to cost them?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know the Minister of Finance wants to speak to this.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, here comes the heavy hitter.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Literally.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Why? Because your members are interjecting; that's why I'm stopping the clock.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would refer the leader of the third party to table 8, page 134 of the budget, which clearly delineates, year by year, the tax reform measures that the government has proposed. With respect to the conversion of the RST base to the new sales tax base, she will see that this year it's $1.6 billion; next year, $2.1 billion; and then $2.35 billion. I would also refer the member to every fall statement that's published that details tax expenditures and best estimates that are outlined by the Ministry of Finance. It's there to see in the public record.

I thank her for the question. I'd also remind her to look at the tax cuts that are available for families, for communities and for businesses.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. The Premier is rejecting our proposal for the legislative committee to travel across the province to actually consult with Ontarians about the harmonized sales tax. He is effectively saying that he doesn't care what small business owners like Stratford's Doug and Kathy White have to say. Here's what they write: "With the tourism from the USA down over the last nine years, all we need is something else—the HST—to drive away more guests. B and Bs are just getting by in Stratford...."

Why is the Premier refusing to listen to people like Doug and Kathy White?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've had a very healthy and, with the passage of time, an ever-more-informed debate about our package of tax reforms, and that is now formally taking place inside the Legislature. But I think it's fair to say that around water coolers, and in fact many breakfast tables, this debate has been ensuing for seven months. As I say, that is a good and healthy thing.

There will be three separate votes in this Legislature where members will have an opportunity to express themselves; there will be fulsome opportunity to debate it. The bill will also go to committee. I also expect, given the nature of this legislation, that it will be the subject of some considerable conversation between now and the next election. That, too, is healthy in a vital democracy such as ours.

But I think, on behalf of Ontarians, there's an important question that we have to continue to put to the opposition: If they're against our plan to create 600,000 more jobs in the course of the next 10 years, where is their plan?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is absolutely outrageous that this Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is absolutely outrageous that this Premier can stand here and dismiss the concerns of people like Doug and Kathy White, saying that they just have to have a conversation at a water cooler instead of being able to talk to the committee about their concerns about the HST. It's an incredibly arrogant thing to say. The 60% of small businesses in this province say that they can't think of one good thing to say about the HST, but the Premier says, "Talk about it at the water cooler."

"As a mid-sized company employing 50-plus employees," small business owner Bev MacWilliams says, "I would like to voice my displeasure with your government's idea of implementing the HST tax." What are you telling them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always remarkable when the leader of the NDP stands up and champions the interests of business, but I will tell you that there is a very broad consensus in the business community and among economists of all political stripes that the single most important thing we can do to strengthen our economy and

create jobs is to move ahead with our package of tax reforms. We are cutting taxes for our small businesses. We are cutting taxes for our larger corporations. We are cutting personal income taxes. We are going to create 600,000 more jobs during the course of the next 10 years. Our tax reforms will result in nearly $50 billion more being invested in businesses in Ontario. We are going to see incomes grow by as much as 9% more than they otherwise would have.

This is part of our plan. We are proud of our plan. We know what the opposition stands against, but I think they owe it to all of us, but especially to Ontarians, to tell us at some point in time what they stand for. Where is their plan to create even a single job in the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Small business owners deserve to be heard, yet the Premier is arrogantly shutting them down. Gary Dinkel from Kitchener writes this: "I run a small business; it's going to hurt me adding another $11.20 per registration."

Adam Malamis says this: "It's quite simple; the HST is not small-business-friendly and adds absolutely no value to the business community as a whole."

Cheryl Sellors writes this: "As a small business person who provides services to my clients, I strongly oppose the implementation of the HST."

My question is this: Why will this Premier not give small business owners a say by making sure Ontarians are able to review the HST through a committee process all across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I appreciate the representation made by my honourable colleague, but I disagree with her fundamentally in terms of what we need to do together to strengthen this economy and create more jobs. There will be ample opportunity for debate in this House. There will be committee hearings. Members, I expect, will have created opportunities of their own accord in their ridings and around Ontario to make sure that they're hearing from Ontarians.

Beyond that, what it falls down to—and there's no escaping this painful reality. We have a plan. We're putting forward a package of tax reforms. We're cutting personal income taxes. We're cutting taxes for small business. We're cutting taxes for big business. We're going ahead with the HST. We're going to create 600,000 more jobs than we otherwise would have under the existing system. That's our plan. We're proud of that plan. On behalf of Ontarians, I ask the opposition: Where's your plan?

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to Minister Takhar. Minister, you're the integrity czar and minister responsible for the Office of the Integrity Commissioner. What do you think of the former Deputy Premier's riding president and top fundraiser, Jason Grier, collecting donations from companies for which he helped to win health and energy contracts? What do you think of that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We have taken all the right steps to make sure that everybody has no conflict of interest. We have made sure that we have all the expense claims now approved, all the consultants' expenses now being claimed, and that they not be lobbying—

Interjections.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The Premier has announced an external government review of the accountability of all agencies, boards and commissions. We have just recently announced another four steps to increase accountability to protect taxpayers' dollars. We are moving ahead to make sure that accountability will be improved, and all the right steps have been taken.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, let's keep in mind that you're the only minister in Ontario's history to be censured by the Integrity Commissioner for failing to keep an arm's-length relationship with a member of your riding executive.

But integrity czar Takhar did not pull the former Deputy Premier aside when he made Jason Grier his top man in his riding fundraising efforts. You didn't say anything when Grier's lobbying efforts surprisingly followed his old boss Smitherman. You didn't do anything when Grier's clients donated some of the government money they received to Liberal ridings. Have you brought this issue, this conflict matter, to the attention of the Integrity Commissioner?

1100

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think it's important for us to make sure we have all the right procedures and policies in place so that taxpayer dollars are protected. That's why we have moved ahead to make sure that all consultants' expenses from now on are approved at the right places, all expenses are approved at the right places, and there are no sole contracts being offered anywhere.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew will withdraw the comment that that he just made.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We are not only doing that, but we are also making it easier for people to actually understand and employees to understand what policies and procedures they have to comply with. We have moved with those changes in the last few months to protect and make sure that taxpayer dollars are taken care of.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Yesterday, the Liberal majority blocked a motion that would have called Mrs. Sarah Kramer and Dr. Alan Hudson, the top two officials at eHealth during the scandal, to testify before the public accounts committee. Accusations have been made against those people, and they should have a right to defend themselves, to clear

their names and to give their side of the story so that we can turn the page and move on.

This refusal to hear witnesses leaves me feeling suspicious, so my question is simple: Is the Premier afraid that the appearance of Mrs. Kramer or Dr. Hudson would reveal a close relationship to his office?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my colleague. It was much along the lines of one put earlier today by a member of the Conservative Party, and my answer is the same.

The auditor had a specific opinion on this, and I think we should respect that. He said on at least two specific occasions that he was aware of the allegations that party politics—and that's what my colleague is after here. She's insinuating that party politics were at play. He says of party politics, "There was no evidence of this during our work." He said that on a couple of occasions.

I think the auditor was nothing if not thorough. I think we have a responsibility to accept every part of his work, all of his findings and all of his recommendations. We on this side of the House have agreed to do that, and I think we should, among other things, respect his finding that there were no party politics at work in this.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I am not after party politics. I want those people to have an opportunity to give their side of the story. Sitting in public accounts, people made accusations against those people, and they have no way to defend themselves, to clear their name and to let us know what really happened because you won't let them testify. This afternoon, we will be bringing a motion to ask for Mrs. Kramer and Dr. Hudson to come forward. Will you let the motion go through so they can clear their names? They deserve this.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've got to admit it's an interesting approach: What they really want to do is help the individuals involved, and that's their rationale for having them appear before the committee.

I'm not sure that they would see the opposition that way. But I think the point here is the one made by the auditor. He was very specific with respect to his findings. He said at least twice that party politics were not involved in this, that they were not at play in all this. I think we should respect that.

I think what Ontarians want us to do now is to move forward, do everything we can to ensure that we have in place at the earliest possible opportunity electronic health records for all of us. That will facilitate our health care, it will improve our health care, and it will help us better manage our costs when it comes to our health care.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, earlier this fall I specifically asked you about progress being made to deliver affordable housing in Ontario. On Monday, the Housing Network of Ontario released a report that summarized consultations your ministry led this summer on developing a long-term affordable housing strategy for Ontario.

The report listed three main areas that need urgent attention:

(1) Ontarians need a comprehensive, fully funded, long-term affordable housing strategy with bold targets.

(2) Housing insecurity, homelessness and poverty are inseparably linked.

(3) People who have direct experience of housing insecurity and housing-related poverty should be at the centre of a housing strategy.

Minister, what progress is your ministry making to develop a strategy? When can we expect to see meaningful progress on this file?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by congratulating the member from Willowdale, one of the most knowledgeable members on housing, a former chair of Toronto Community Housing, who speaks with great experience and depth and eloquence on the need for an affordable housing strategy.

Since June, when I visited Sault Ste. Marie, we began a consultative process around the province. Over 1,000 Ontarians came out to the government of Ontario housing consultation process. We're pleased with the input. We thank—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Minister?

Hon. Jim Watson: We take the issue of affordable housing very seriously in this government. That's why, in 2007, the Premier made a commitment in our election platform that we would develop a long-term affordable housing strategy. We're working with housing advocates throughout the province, and we recognize that there is a need to support those individuals who are looking for safe, decent and affordable housing.

I'd be happy to answer with some specifics on what we've done to date after the honourable member's supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Minister. I know that your ministry has been delivering on the 2009 budget commitment to invest $1.2 billion in housing, but the investment needs to be delivered over a two-year period that will end on March 31, 2011. I've seen the news and I know that your ministry is making progress on delivering on our commitment, but the time frame to deliver is not long.

November 22 is National Housing Day. What message will you be conveying to Ontario families who are looking to our government, to your ministry, to meet the affordable housing demands across the province? Minister, what are you going to tell them on November 22?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm going to tell them that this government is acting on our commitments, unlike the Conservatives, who slashed housing and downloaded that service to municipalities, and the NDP, who talked a good tale about housing but failed to deliver on housing.

This government is providing $622 million, matched by the federal government, for a total of $1.2 billion. That money has already started to flow: here in Toronto, $3.5 million to three projects under the social housing repair and retrofit program, part of an allocation of $220 million going to the city of Toronto. In total, 50,000 units will be renovated and retrofitted over the course of the next two years and 4,500 new affordable housing units will be built for the people of Ontario.

We're proud of the work we're doing. It's a record amount of money in a two-year period, and we're delivering for the people who need affordable housing in this province.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Have you asked the provincial Auditor General to investigate whether taxpayers have received value for the $81 million spent on the Windsor Energy Centre and why it was built in the first place?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are a number of issues associated with that centre that are now before the courts, the member knows well. I have had the opportunity to read both sides of the court submissions. They are detailed. They will precipitate a court discussion where witnesses will be called and where testimony will be given under oath, and I think that will give Ontarians the opportunity to see exactly what has transpired in this transaction. It's one that I have indicated I'm not at all pleased with. I believe that the court proceedings will bring light to this and that they will do so with informed testimony under oath from both sides. We will see where that court case winds up.

We are interested in defending the interests of Ontario taxpayers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: When the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle kicked off the summer of scandal, Premier McGuinty praised transparency and the Auditor General to absolutely anyone who'd listen. But when the summer drew to a close, the scandals did not, Minister, and from the very first questions I asked you in September about the energy centre, you ducked behind lawsuits and police investigations, which do not remotely relate to the questions I'm asking. Now you say that it isn't necessary to get the auditor involved. Are you telling me that bad planning, off-book proposals, $40-million budget overruns, a sole-source contract at $15,000 a day and an $81-million power plant that doesn't produce a single watt do not merit an auditor's investigation? Do you have to waste $1 billion of taxpayer money before you call in the Auditor General?

1110

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I don't think there's a more transparent forum in the land than the courts of justice. There will be full testimony. Relationships will be disclosed with respect to the protagonist, relationships I'm sure the member opposite will be interested in and that I'll be speaking a bit more about in future questions in the House.

I think that the court process will allow testimony to be given under oath that will allow the public to see very clearly—and the documents are already available outlining the cases of both sides: the case put by the contractor and the case put by OLG.

Our government's interest is in protecting the taxpayer. We believe that that transparent, public, open court process will do that as well as any other method. I stand behind our courts of justice.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the minister of children's services. Minister, you'll know that Payukotayno, the child protection service agency for James Bay and Hudson Bay, is set to close its door in mid-December. You know the reason why: They're facing a financial shortfall as a result of your government's inability to deal with the adequate funding they need to operate. This agency is going to be shut down in mid-December. Our question is, what is your plan to care for those children under their care, once that agency closes down?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to talk about the role that the province plays in looking after our most vulnerable children. It's a responsibility that we take incredibly seriously. Because of that responsibility and the seriousness in which we hold it, it is incumbent upon us to find a way to ensure that children's aid societies operate within a framework that is sustainable.

Over the last number of years, we have increased funding year over year. We have seen a 40% increase in funding, which is far outpacing the usage of the services being provided. But that is why we are putting in place a sustainability commission, why we are working closely to examine the funding formula, and why we are working immediately with every single CAS across the province in our regional offices to find a pathway to manage cash flow, to develop partnerships and to ensure that we put Ontario's kids first—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Putting Ontario's kids first? Eighty people have attempted suicide—the youth of James Bay—in the last year alone, 11 of whom were successful, and you stand in this House and give us this type of answer to what is a crisis in those communities?

We need to know what you're going to do in order to ensure that we have the services in place to care for these kids. We cannot continue going this way. We can't keep on going to funeral after funeral on the James Bay because of your inability to deal with this.

The question is simply this: What are you going to do in order to ensure the safety of these children?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Earlier this week my colleague Minister Duguid and I had the opportunity to sit at

the table with the Chiefs of Ontario to work with those leaders, to work in partnership, to find a pathway forward, to tackle issues that, frankly, sir, you did not tackle when you had the opportunity to do so. We understand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East should be in his seat.

Minister?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We committed to work in partnership with the Chiefs of Ontario to have an opportunity—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I would ask the members to come to order. The question was asked to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. If the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the honourable member from Timmins–James Bay would like to have a discussion, either have it as a question-and-answer or I would encourage you to please have a discussion in one of the side chambers following question period.

Minister.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: This is a serious issue and it deserves an approach that gives it its importance, not one where we put information forward with a lack of desire to work through and find solutions.

My commitment to the chiefs, the commitment of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, was to continue to work forward, to work with them at a level of ministerial responsibility, to work through the regional offices, to find a solution to this issue—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. People in my riding are concerned about the new harmonized sales tax and are following the debate very closely. There's a lot of incorrect information floating around out there, and certain groups—who choose to play politics and put partisan political interests before solving the economic challenges facing Ontario—are deliberately misrepresenting the facts. In the town of Cobourg last month, the Leader of the Opposition stated that cellphone costs are going up as a result of the HST. Consumers know that they already pay GST and PST on cellphone fees. There will be no additional taxes. It seems that those who are opposed are playing fast and loose with the facts.

To the minister: Tell us if cellphone fees are going to be subject to a new tax.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Obviously, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand that five plus eight equals 13. He believes that that's somehow greater than 13. When I had the opportunity to talk to the member, I assured him that today cellphone fees are charged PST and GST and that when we bring in the harmonized sales tax administered by the federal government, the rate will be 13%.

But I had an opportunity to listen to a Mr. Kedderman, who represents Telus, on the John Tory radio show, and when John Tory interviewed him, he said, "Actually, our prices will be able to come down, because right now the PST is a hidden tax." Because of the fact that we are harmonizing the sales tax, listening and being in partnership with the federal government, we are substantially lowering the cost of business for telecommunications companies. That is why the Information Technology Association of Canada endorses our tax reforms. They say that they're going to hire more people and put more people back to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Minister, my next question is about children's activities, such as music lessons and reading, which are important to families in my riding. The member for Cambridge issued a press release which stated that music lessons and books will be subject to HST. When the HST was announced, an exemption for books was announced with it, and the fact of the matter is, music lessons are not subject to GST and therefore won't be subject to HST.

Those who are opposed have chosen to play politics with Ontario's economic future and are misrepresenting the facts. Minister, are the rules around the GST changing, or are some people simply choosing to play politics with our future?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to all the parents out there that there is no additional tax that's going to be applied to music lessons, nor will there be a new provincial portion of tax paid on books. That is clear; we have been clear about that. If something does not attract a GST today, it does not attract the HST after July 1. That's very simple. Now, perhaps for some others, it is may be complicated for them to work their way through that, but on this side of the House the rule is quite simple.

I do want to say to the members opposite that for every item that may attract the new provincial portion of the HST, each and every one of those companies' costs are going down. What companies who believe in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm going to take this opportunity to give the final warning to the member from Hamilton East. If he persists, I will have no choice but to name the honourable member.

Minister.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say to the people that for every one of those items, the actual cost of business for those companies is going down.

We have the leadership of a company like Telus who says what they're going to do with that money: They're going to reinvest in our province because they believe in the high quality of life we have here in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: On February 28, 2006, a subdivision in Caledonia, Douglas Creek Estates,

was forcibly occupied. Since that time, this property and the remaining house on the site has served as a base for intimidation, harassment, trespassing, assault and attempted murder.

Three and a half years ago, you purchased the property from the home builders. For three and a half years, someone has been providing water and electricity to this occupied house. Premier, has your government been paying the bills for militants illegally occupying that house?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

1120

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to start off by saying that, indeed, we are working very, very hard in that part of the province to work with Six Nations' leadership, to work with the local municipalities. We're making great progress in bringing people together in that community. Municipality after municipality now in that region—and the member knows this—are signing agreements with the Six Nations to work together.

When the member raises question like these, with the intent, I believe, to split parties apart and try to drive a wedge between parties, I think it is particularly unhelpful.

We're going to continue working with all parties in that area to build a better relationship so we can move forward together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Premier, to answer my own question, you are footing the electricity bill. Since 2006, Dalton Creek Estates and the remaining house have been occupied and barricaded under the flag of the Mohawk warriors. This is an organization described by the OPP as "a lawless group, usually armed, with a reputation akin to the Hell's Angels."

On April 20, 2006, the OPP were driven from the site in a pitched battle involving baseball bats, shovels, hockey sticks, two-by-fours and bags filled with rocks.

By continuing to pay the water and electricity bills, what are you doing about the perception out there that your McGuinty government is supporting and condoning the activities and actions of militant law-breakers? When will you stop sticking taxpayers with these utility bills?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It sounds to me like the member's getting very close to an ongoing lawsuit that's taking place, so I'm not going to comment directly on that aspect. But I will comment on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Start it up again.

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Actually, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this because it gives me an opportunity to compare the approaches being taken by members and leaders in that community, like our member from Brant, Dave Levac, who is tirelessly working, contrary to the member opposite, to bring people together in that community to reach out and try to create economic development partnerships. That's the approach that this government takes—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TERMINATION AND SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. In March, more than 80 Windsor workers at two plants owned by Catalina Precision Products lost their jobs and were denied termination, severance and vacation payments. More than six months later, these workers are still legally owed more than $2 million.

My question is this: What is this government doing to ensure these workers get all of the money that they're entitled to under Ontario law?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This government wants to ensure that all employment standards rights are upheld and adhered to in this province. That's why this government has invested heavily in our employment standards claims office, in our officers, so that they can assist those workers in this community as well as in communities across Ontario to ensure that those workers' claims are being treated fairly and that they are receiving the money that is owed to them.

I remind the member that from between 1989 and 2003, over a span of 14 years, there were only 97 employment standards prosecutions initiated. Since 2004, there have been over 1,800 prosecutions initiated in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It seems to me that what this minister is really admitting is that he not been very successful in making sure these workers are getting their money. Some of the workers are owed tens of thousands of dollars.

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Most had at least a decade of service in the company.

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: They have bills to pay. They have children to feed. Yet the McGuinty government is refusing to act on an issue that is clearly within its jurisdiction—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just take this opportunity to offer a final warning to the member from Renfrew, and if he persists I will be forced to name him. Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The NDP have a bill. It's called Bill 6. It passed second reading in this Legislature two years ago and deals directly with this kind of problem.

Why does the government block this bill that would guarantee workers, like those in Windsor, getting all of the back pay, vacation pay and severance pay that they are legally owed?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question, and the opportunity to say again that myself as Minister of Labour, and former Ministers of Labour of this government have called and written the federal government to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. We want to move those workers, that have given much of their lives to companies, from the back of the line to the front of the line. I ask the member to do the same: Ask the federal government to change that act, to amend that act.

On the same front, when it comes to our employment standards, we have added additional resources. We continue to close a record number of claims in this province and recoup those funds that are owed to workers across Ontario. That is what we will continue to do, that's what we will continue to focus on, and I would hope the member would get on board and call the federal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. As members are aware, our government has taken extraordinary steps to support residents in northern Ontario. After years of neglect, we've taken action to address the challenges facing northern Ontario, including increasing spending on northern highways from $256 million to over $648 million, increasing education funding by 41% and increasing spending on health care by over 45%, as well as building a new $400-million hospital in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

When the high dollar and reduced global demand began to affect the forestry industry, our government put forward a $1.1-billion aid package for the forestry sector—the largest investment in the history of Ontario. Constituents in my community continue to benefit from the province's support for the economy, but they want to know what the vision is for the future prosperity of Sault Ste. Marie and the entire region.

Minister, can you elaborate on our plan for success in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the member for the question. Indeed, bolstering the economy of northern Ontario, particularly during these challenging times, is a real priority for our government, which is why we are so pleased with the record investments in health care, education, transportation and infrastructure. But we also recognize that indeed this also requires a view toward the future, a vision for the economic blueprint for the north, which is why we were so pleased that the second growth plan was designated for northern Ontario. In fact, a lot of work went into this, but we've been doing a tremendous amount of work and put out a draft northern Ontario growth plan a couple of weeks ago. Consultations are going on right now. This will be our guide to developing a more innovative and knowledge-based economy and will certainly help to strengthen our northern Ontario communities and First Nations. It is a blueprint for a strategy that will chart a new economic development direction for the north, and we're very excited about it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Orazietti: Certainly in northern Ontario we're very encouraged by the northern Ontario growth plan and all of the benefits it will contain for northerners.

As we know, we're facing one of the worst global recessions since the Great Depression. In response, we've taken a number of steps to help stimulate the economy and create jobs. Over the next two years we are investing $32.5 billion in infrastructure that will help to create thousands of new jobs to help support Ontario families and Ontario communities.

1130

In Sault Ste. Marie, the plan is already working. The unemployment rate in the community dropped from 11.1% to 8.3% in October as stimulus funding has begun to flow. Residents in my community are encouraged by the progress they have seen with respect to job creation but are still unsure about the future economic outlook.

Minister, how will the new plan help to ensure that northern Ontario families will have opportunities for meaningful employment over the next generation?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Our goals are very straightforward, and I certainly could not be more pleased with the support that we are receiving across the north for the growth plan and for the vision that it brings forward. Our goals are straightforward. We want to bolster population growth. We want to strengthen the north's economy. We want to pave a path of educational and career opportunities for young northerners, certainly including aboriginal youth. We want to generate more jobs. That's the goal; that's the vision.

There are a number of recommendations that are within the report which, again, we are feeling very positive about. Some examples: We will be upgrading the energy transmission network and increasing the capacity for renewable energy projects across northern Ontario, including for many aboriginal communities, which, again, is something that's very positive. We are going to put in place a new forest tenure system that will allow for innovation and growth in forestry and the emerging bioeconomy industry.

I wish I had more time to explain the other recommendations—many actual items; good news. We're working hard to promote the north.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. In the 2008-09 estimates, $277 million was allocated for business risk management, which is, of course, the safety net for our farmers. But according to the public accounts on page 2-14, some time after that funding was publicly announced with great fanfare, over $82 million was quietly taken out of that fund. Why did you cut the money out of the support for our farmers?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important to clarify for the honourable member that this government

has only increased support for the agriculture sector, for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, since coming to government in 2003. The honourable member would also know that with respect to the risk management programs that we have in place in this province, they are demand-driven. In any given year, we put an amount of money aside, and it's there if it is needed, but it is only delivered when applications are made to the fund. So I would say to the honourable member that we are absolutely committed to supporting farmers. We have signed a partnership agreement with the federal government, and those dollars flow to farmers consistent with that framework agreement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Minister, I know you're a little out of touch with the farmers in Ontario. While you were telling farmers across the province that there was nothing you could do, that all the money had been spent, hog farmers, fruit and vegetable farmers and cattle farmers were struggling. They are losing their farms, and you don't seem to care. They didn't fit the program, so we used the money somewhere else. We didn't spend $82 million that was set aside to help these farmers; it wasn't spent for that purpose.

Minister, will you commit to using that $82 million to help the struggling farmers who are struggling today?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Farmers in the province of Ontario know that the McGuinty government has always been there for them. We've always listened to them when they brought us their issues.

In fact, today I had a meeting with farm leadership, who continue to make me aware of where the challenges are. Even tomorrow in Guelph, we again are meeting with farm leadership to understand how we can improve upon the business risk management programs that are in place that are not meeting the needs in our agriculture sector. Farmers are facing challenging times, and we do want to work with them. We want to also impress on our federal partner that we need to do a better job providing supports in difficult, challenging times. That is the purpose of our meeting today. It is the purpose of our meeting in Guelph tomorrow. We will continue to work hard—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Today, the executive board of Metrolinx is meeting behind closed doors with politicians at Queen's Park. Meanwhile, Metrolinx officials refused to address citizens' concerns about diesel trains, piledriving and a series of other complaints. Metrolinx has in fact waged a public relations campaign for diesel trains in which they deliberately play down the health concerns about diesel trains voiced by Toronto's medical officer of health and many, many others. Given widespread concern about diesel trains, why won't the government and Metrolinx officials meet with concerned citizens like the Ontario Clean Train Coalition?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Actually, I would say that my take is different from the member's on this issue. I think there's been a lot of consultation that has taken place to this point in time, more consultation than I can remember for some period of time—certainly more than on the social contract; I know that much. But that's irrelevant to this.

I do want to say that they've had all kinds of open houses; they have engaged in dialogue with individuals. I saw some at a meeting they were attending the other day. There have been written communications. My gosh, there have been all kinds of consultation that's taken place. I would say you're not characterizing that consultation as accurately as you might, and I know that in fairness, as you evaluate all of the consultation that is taking place, you will change your mind entirely.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Metrolinx has now closed its meetings to the public and is refusing to listen to public concerns. Now on top of that, Infrastructure Ontario is negotiating a secret deal with SNC-Lavalin to operate hundreds of polluting diesel trains between downtown Toronto and Pearson airport each and every day. The government refuses to make public what is being negotiated—guaranteed profits, perhaps, or exclusive rights; we don't know. Why is the government allowing Infrastructure Ontario to negotiate a secret sole-source billion-dollar contract with SNC-Lavalin—another one?

Hon. James J. Bradley: You don't know where to start with a question like this. Remember when the Disney program had Fantasyland? This is Fantasyland that you're engaging in. There is consultation taking place. Let me give an example of it: There's a 16-person panel comprised of local community representatives, including experts in areas such as transportation, environment, engineering, health, urban planning, alternative energy, community leadership, GO ridership and business. It includes Eli Malinsky of the Ontario Clean Train Coalition, former Ontario Environment Commissioner Eva Ligeti, Bob Oliver of Pollution Probe and Dr. Linn Holness of St. Michael's Hospital. That's yet another example, when you ask about electrification, for instance, which was somewhere in your question—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to take this opportunity to welcome in the west gallery Mr. Mike Schreiner. Mike is the new leader of the Green Party of Ontario. Michael, welcome to Queen's Park today.

Also, I would like to welcome a former tourism minister of Nova Scotia in the east gallery, Jack MacIsaac, and his wife, Evelyn. Welcome to Ontario, sir.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby–Oshawa has given her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question

given by the Premier concerning payments from the Sudbury hospital to McKinsey for a sole-source contract and the shut down of the public accounts committee. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Nepean–Carleton has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier as to how much the HST will cost family physicians and the health care system. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs concerning the Ontario government paying the utility costs of an illegally occupied property in Caledonia. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I would like to introduce to the Legislature an exceptional young person from the riding of Mississauga–Streetsville about whom I will say more in a moment. Natasha Barnes is in the members' east gallery. She is accompanied by her grandfather Cecil Barnes, her grandmother Brenda Barnes and her sister Tamika Barnes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to introduce Susan Rogers from my constituency office; Etana, who's shadowing me for the day; and also some women from the Dog Legislation Council of Canada.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SALVATION ARMY

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm proud to rise today on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus to pay tribute to the Salvation Army's annual Christmas campaign taking place in communities across Ontario and Canada.

The Salvation Army's kettle campaign raises much-needed funds to assist those less fortunate families in our communities during the holiday season.

In my riding, Salvation Army Majors Roland Shea and Nancy Hudon and their team of volunteers are hard at work, aiming to collect $100,000 in the campaign this year. Contributions to the kettle campaign will assist hundreds of low-income working families who cannot afford food and toys at Christmas time.

Until Christmas Eve, Salvation army kettles will be manned by bell ringers at numerous locations through Cambridge and North Dumfries and thousands across Ontario. I encourage all of you to give to this most worthwhile campaign and to other worthy charities in your respective communities that are striving to make the holiday season the happy occasion for all.

I wish to convey my deep appreciation to Majors Shea and Hudon and their staff and volunteers, who work so hard at this time of year to ensure that Christmas is a joyous time for all families in Cambridge and North Dumfries.

Please help the Salvation Army in their good work in your community.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The community colleges have been in contract negotiations with their faculty for over five months. Without warning, on November 12 the negotiators for college management broke off talks and announced they were going to unilaterally impose their terms on the faculty.

OPSEU has attempted to implement the recommendations of the independently-chaired workload task force that examined workloads, academic freedom and quality of education. Rather than negotiate, the colleges have refused to accept their responsibility and are simply going to impose terms and conditions of employment—many of which will weaken the college system and hurt students. These actions will destroy staff morale in the colleges. They will do damage to the college system and to the students.

Allowing this to happen also calls into question the McGuinty government's respect for collective bargaining. This government claims it puts students first, but bypassing the negotiation process also bypasses the needs of our students. Imposed settlements always have negative long-term consequences.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities must tell the college negotiators to get back to the bargaining table to negotiate fair, equitable and long-term solutions to many of the problems facing our community colleges. It's time for the colleges to get back to the bargaining table.

NATASHA BARNES

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise to recognize a remarkable person in the riding of Mississauga–Streetsville who has overcome great obstacles to make meaningful and lasting contributions to our western Mississauga community.

I was originally contacted by Natasha Barnes's sister Tamika to recognize her sister's accomplishment in receiving a Canada Millennium Scholarship Excellence Award. After reading Tamika's e-mail, I invited them to my office to hear a little bit more about their story.

After their mother passed away suddenly in 2004, Natasha began the process to become her younger sister's legal guardian, which she was by February 2005.

In addition to gaining custody of her teenaged sister, Natasha worked and volunteered, dedicating her life to

her sister and to those in need in our community. At the age of 30, Tasha decided to go back to school and enrolled at Sheridan College for social work. She volunteers for Bereaved Families of Ontario, started an HIV/AIDS awareness group, and helps out secondary schools in the area.

Recently, Natasha was recognized as a Canada Millennium Scholarship Excellence Award winner. These are given to Canadians who demonstrate leadership, community involvement, innovation and academic achievement.

Natasha celebrates her mother's legacy through her dedication to her sister, her volunteerism and her educational pursuits.

Congratulations, Natasha Barnes. Ontario is proud of you.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: The other day, at a True Patriot Love event, the Ministry of Government Services introduced a support-our-troops licence plate. The minister has gone on ad infinitum about his tremendous support for the members of our Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to give him an opportunity to attach action to those words.

CFB Petawawa is in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The town of Petawawa has a population of over 16,000 residents, of which 5,300 are serving members of the military, 1,000 civilian support people, and 5,600 family members of those military families.

The opportunity exists for the minister to assist them. This is an issue that has been going on since I've been here, and most certainly before I was here, and that is a proper licensing bureau, a ServiceOntario establishment within the town of Petawawa to serve those troops. It's a golden opportunity for the Minister of Government Services to stand in his place and say, "Not only do I say I support Canada's troops, but I will see that they get the proper services within the town of Petawawa so that I can attach action to those words."

This is an opportunity for the minister. I ask him to move on that as quickly as possible so that those brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces are not denied the kinds of services they would have in any other area.

DIABETES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: As members know, November is Diabetes Month in Canada. Diabetes is estimated to affect 1.2 million people in this province by next year, and we must do everything we can to make sure we help those at risk and those afflicted to get the best care and guidance to manage this condition.

In light of this, I'm pleased to rise today to share some of the excellent work that is being done in my community of Ottawa Centre to educate and help those with this pervasive disease. I would like to commend our government for the recent investment in expanding diabetes education teams and other measures in Ottawa as part of the Ontario diabetes strategy. This important program addresses this serious disease with serious consequences head-on.

Particularly, I would like to recognize the Centretown Community Health Centre for being community leaders in this fight. The CCHC has been offering diabetes programs for 11 years in six different languages, servicing several thousand clients each year where they want to be seen—in their community. The community diabetes education program of Ottawa, led by CCHC, has been so successful that this past May they were given the Community Partner Award by the Canadian Diabetes Association in recognition of their outstanding contribution.

The focus of the program is to support people to self-manage their diabetes and reduce complications associated with the disease while improving their quality of life. It is great news that they will have even more resources now to expand on their good work.

The Centretown Community Health Centre is also quick to point to their strong partnership with 14 other community health groups, our area hospitals, and more and more primary care providers.

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS

Mr. Norm Miller: Recently, I attended an information session hosted by the Canadian Foundation for Women's Health. I listened intently to Dr. Jennifer Blake as she described the dire situation in Ontario with regard to the human papilloma virus and its vaccination program. I subsequently sponsored a press conference for Dr. Blake here at Queen's Park to get out the message about the benefits of the HPV vaccination program.

It is estimated that 75% of the population will be exposed to some form of HPV; 70% of cervical cancers are caused by HPV, and cervical cancer is the second most common type of cancer in women aged 20 to 44. Each year, 1,500 Canadians are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and for more than one third of those women, the disease is fatal.

1510

In the United States, the FDA has approved the vaccine for boys and men as well, recognizing the fact that they are also at risk. The number of HPV vaccines needed to prevent one death is only 639; this, compared to the 5,000 needed for influenza. Vaccination is 100% effective in preventing disease from the most common types of HPV infection and is considered extremely safe by the CDC.

In Canada, vaccination programs in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec have reported uptake of 80% and 87% respectively, while the uptake is lagging behind here in Ontario at 53%. We must do a better job here in Ontario.

ELLSIN ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

Mr. David Orazietti: I rise in the House today to congratulate Ellsin Environmental, a business in my riding with an innovative new technology to recycle tires, which is supported by a $2-million investment by our government. Several months ago the Premier and I announced that the province would be funding the construction of a 10,000-square-foot waste tire pilot plant. Just last week in the riding I had the opportunity to break ground on this initiative.

Ellsin will offer new solutions to existing tire recycling, disposal and environmental challenges. Establishing this new and innovative business in our city will also help to create new jobs and further establish Sault Ste. Marie as a leader in green technology.

This investment was made through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. under its Enterprises North job creation program. Through this program, the NOHFC provides financial assistance to the private sector to help bring new jobs and economic prosperity to the north.

The new facility will be established to help break down scrap tires to their original elements of carbon black, oil, gas and steel. This initiative is part of our government's strategy to help support green energy projects in the Soo and area, projects such as the $400-million Brookfield wind farm, the largest project in Ontario, and the $360-million investment in Pod Solar to create a 60-megawatt solar project in our community, as well as $7 million to green schools with energy retrofits.

In Sault Ste. Marie we are attracting and retaining our talented workforce by continuing to diversify our economy and becoming a leader in green job technology.

MAGGIE WHEELER

Mr. Jim Brownell: Maggie Wheeler is one of the true outstanding authors from my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and her latest book, On a Darkling Plain, scheduled to be released on Friday, is another example of her talent.

Maggie makes her home in the St. Lawrence River community of Ingleside, in a house that once stood in the lost village of Dickinson's Landing. Since the release of her first novel, A Violent End, in 2001, followed by The Brother of Sleep in 2004 and All Mortall Things in 2006, Maggie has been increasingly in demand for classroom lectures, symposium presentations and media interviews. She shares insight into the writing process and has also become a prominent voice in the growing contemporary movement to preserve and celebrate the stories of this country and the St. Lawrence Seaway of eastern Ontario.

In 2002 she was awarded Outstanding Business Professional of the Year by the Women Entrepreneurs of Cornwall and Area. Dedicated to community service, she is past secretary of the South Stormont Chamber of Commerce, past director of the women's entrepreneurs, and currently sits on the board of directors for the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Legal Clinic. Maggie is also a life member of the Lost Villages Historical Society. Currently, Maggie is working toward completing her Master's degree in English literature at Carleton University. With studies completed next year, there will be more time for her children and family, and she is looking forward to the luxury of sitting down every day to write.

On behalf of my colleagues in this House I would like to congratulate Maggie Wheeler on her literary successes. I wish her the very best in the future as she sits to write about the history of Ontario, and eastern Ontario in particular.

TAXATION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Our government wants to help our province stay on the right track for future economic growth. We have proposed HST and permanent tax cuts that will create new jobs and reduce prices on many consumer purchases. For example, 90,000 low-income Ontarians will no longer pay any provincial personal income tax.

This plan has many important benefits for low-income families and individuals. Many families in Scarborough–Rouge River will benefit from the permanent personal tax cuts and credits of this plan. We're providing additional support for Ontarians during the first two years of transition to the HST. Starting in July 2010, eligible Ontario families will receive $1,000 and individuals will receive $300 in the form of three payments. On top of that, we're also almost doubling current property and sales tax credits, and we have announced HST exemptions for items families need, such as children's clothing and diapers.

Our proposed plan contains a fair, balanced and progressive package of tax cuts for both people and businesses that, when combined with the HST, will put more money back into the pockets of all our hard-working Ontario families.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on long-term-care homes—medication management from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This report is different from other reports that the public accounts committee has submitted to this Legislature in the past. Traditionally, we submit about nine

or 10 different reports each year. In this report, the committee came to an unusual juncture, in that all committee members agreed, from the evidence that they collected at the committee and from the Auditor General's report of 2007 with regard to medication and long-term-care homes, that they had to make a recommendation which was outside of the norm. That recommendation was: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is strongly concerned about the overmedication of long-term-care home residents and concludes that the present compensation mechanisms for physicians and pharmacists should be restructured.

It's not normal that the committee takes a position on a quasi-policy issue. Our function in the public accounts committee is to deal with the administration and implementation of different programs. We were looking primarily here at how prescribed medicine was being administered to those people. There are some 75,000 people in long-term-care homes across the province of Ontario. The Auditor General found that between 23% and 28% of these long-term-care residents—that would amount to something like 15,000 to 20,000 people in Ontario—were being prescribed 12 or more different medications on average, along with non-prescription drugs. This led the committee to make the very unusual step of putting forward this recommendation.

There are recommendations in the report which also deal with other matters in terms of the Auditor General's findings.

I want to say that this is a different kind of structured report. It is relatively brief, it's only 10 pages long, but it is extremely important.

We urge the Ministry of Health to look at alternate compensation schemes for medications for long-term-care residents. We believe the present one is leading to overmedication and ill health in our long-term-care residents. So we really recommend to the government that the ministry look at different ways of compensating the different people who are involved in caring for our elderly in our long-term-care institutions.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling moves the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1520 to 1550.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour of adjournment of the debate will please rise to be counted by the Clerk.

Those opposed will please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 53; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the debate adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (SENIOR DRIVER'S CONDITIONAL LICENCE), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (PERMIS DE CONDUIRE RESTREINT POUR PERSONNE ÂGÉE)

Mr. Ramal moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to create an optional conditional driver's licence for seniors / Projet de loi 221, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin de créer un permis de conduire restreint facultatif pour les personnes âgées.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1552 to 1557.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Gélinas, France	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Johnson, Rick	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Craitor, Kim	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
DiNovo, Cheri	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Munro, Julia
Dunlop, Garfield	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Martiniuk, Gerry	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 12.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to add a new section which creates a seniors' driver's licence. The minister may issue a seniors'

driver's licence to drivers who have reached 65 years of age, who elect to hold this licence and who meet the requirements set out in this bill. A seniors' driver's licence is subject to the condition that the holder is not permitted to drive a vehicle on specified highways. The bill also provides that any particular test necessary to obtain the seniors' driver's licence will not require driving on the specified highways. There will be more details in the future.

PUBLIC SAFETY RELATED TO DOGS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À LA SÉCURITÉ PUBLIQUE LIÉE AUX CHIENS

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 222, An Act to amend the Dog Owners' Liability Act and the Animals for Research Act / Projet de loi 222, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité des propriétaires de chiens et la Loi sur les animaux destinés à la recherche.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I thank the Dog Legislation Council of Canada. This bill repeals provisions in the Dog Owners' Liability Act that prohibit restricted pit bulls and provide for controls on pit bulls. The bill also repeals provisions in the Animals for Research Act relating to the disposition of pit bulls under that act.

DISABLED PERSONS' SERVICE DOGS ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LES CHIENS D'ASSISTANCE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 223, An Act respecting the rights of disabled persons who use service dogs / Projet de loi 223, Loi traitant des droits des personnes handicapées qui ont recours à des chiens d'assistance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This bill enacts the Disabled Persons' Service Dogs Act, 2009. The act includes a provision stating that no person shall deny accommodation, services or facilities to a person or discriminate against a person with respect to accommodation, services or facilities for the reason that he or she is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog. A person who contravenes the provision is liable to a fine of up to $5,000.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to read a petition into the record for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, hydro, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I support this bill 100% and I send it to the table with Connor.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Lively, Naughton and Whitefish, where I live, in beautiful Nickel Belt. It goes as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service.... ; and

"Whereas, by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" as follows: "To make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Iman.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition in support of proclaiming April as Hispanic Heritage Month, and this is in support of the private member's resolution as introduced by myself and Mr. Colle on December 3. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, film, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

Since I am in favour, I'm delighted to sign this, and my colleagues as well.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I have a petition that means an awful lot to me. On Sunday I was able to go to the Rideau Restaurant in Burritt's Rapids to celebrate the 90th birthday of Lawrence Bielby, and when I was there I noticed on a table a petition signed by hundreds of my residents, who petition the Legislature as follows:

"Whereas residents of Ontario do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for ... haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships ... and legal and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the" $3-billion "blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I am so proud to affix my signature to this petition because it is what the constituents in my riding—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I'm going to remind the members again that they are to read the petition as it is written and are not to be editorializing petitions.

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HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, submitted by the Effort organization of Pakistani professionals in western Mississauga. I especially want to thank Abid Mahmood and Azeem Syed of Mississauga for having collected the signatures—and to everybody, to wish them all an Eid-ul-Adha Mubarak. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals in the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin the planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga–Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Hadhy to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's plan to 'harmonize' the PST and the GST will result in Ontario taxpayers paying 8% more for a multitude of products and services;

"Whereas the 8% tax increase will increase the cost of services such as housing and real estate services, gasoline, hydro bills, home heating fuel, Internet and cable bills, haircuts, gym memberships, legal services, construction and renovations, car repairs, plumbing and electrical services, landscaping services, leisure activities, hotel rooms, veterinary services for the family pet and even funeral services; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers cannot afford this tax grab—particularly in the middle of a recession;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to abandon the sales tax increase announced in the 2009 budget."

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'm pleased to present a petition and am certainly happy that former Minister of Culture Caroline Di Cocco has signed this petition. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas protecting and preserving Ontario's cemeteries is a shared responsibility and the foundation of a civilized society; and

"Whereas failure to safeguard one of our last remaining authentic cultural heritage resources, Ontario's inactive cemeteries, would be disastrous for the continuity of the historical record and our collective culture in this province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by thousands of residents in Oxford county. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I affix my signature to this petition as I agree wholeheartedly with it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition to the Legislative Assembly. It's affectionately known as the grandparents' rights bill.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33 put forward by the MPP from Niagara Falls; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm proud to sign my name to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in a brand-new tax on income that they inaccurately claimed was going to 'health care'; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: gas at the pumps; home heating oil and electricity; postage stamps; haircuts; dry cleaning; home renovations; veterinary care; and arena ice and soccer field rentals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes,

once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I support this petition wholeheartedly.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition. I want to thank Earl Ruhnke, and also Ed and Eleanor Quesnelle again, who have been so good at gathering these petitions all around Renfrew county. I've got thousands and thousands of them.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, hydro, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with Saeyon.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history, but he still cuts health care services and nurses; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes once again on Canada Day 2010, with his new 13% combined GST, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% combined GST will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee, newspapers and magazines, gas at the pumps, home heating oil and electricity, postage stamps, haircuts, dry cleaning, home renovations, veterinary care, arena ice and soccer field rentals, Internet fees, theatre admissions, funerals, courier fees, fast food sold for $4"—that's just temporary—"bus fares, golf green fees, gym fees, snowplowing, bicycles, taxi fares, train fares, domestic air travel, accountant services and real estate commissions;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I sign this petition as I agree with it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO LABOUR MOBILITY ACT, 2009

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2009 SUR LA MOBILITÉ DE LA MAIN-D'OEUVRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as members may know, or as you know, I had the floor yesterday but ran out of time as we headed toward question period, so it's a pleasure for me to pick up the debate again on Bill 175, which involves labour mobility here in the province of Ontario. In fact, it's a pan-Canadian objective. The debate that we're having here today will be going on and has been going on in Legislatures across this country, as all of us attempt to align our provisions on labour mobility.

I had a chance yesterday in my remarks to speak a little bit about the principles behind this and set a bit of a context that way. Really, I want to put this in a little bit of an economic context, because I think all of us look at all pieces of legislation before us in this Legislature during this economic downturn with a real eye to how it is going to affect the Ontario economy and how it is going to improve things for those workers, those families here in the province of Ontario.

As I think I mentioned yesterday, part of the challenge for this government—really, for every government across Canada—is not only to make sure that we weather the current economic storm, but that we emerge stronger than ever.

I think there's a changing reality here in Ontario—and I've heard the Premier speak about it many times—that we are in a transition right now, a transformation away from sort of the low-wage economy of the past. We're no longer able to compete with the great giants of China, India, Brazil and other major countries based on low

wages. In fact, what we want to do is go further and develop the well-educated, well-trained society and population that are going to be able to compete with the best around the world.

As a government, of course, we've taken that very seriously. As the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, I've been very proud of the investments that we've made in terms of our workforce, both in our colleges and universities, and through apprenticeships. We're building that skilled workforce which is going to take Ontario into the future.

But at the same time as investing in training and education, we have to make sure that we remove obstacles for individuals to find jobs, to find a career moving forward. I think members are aware that Canada is one of those peculiar countries on Earth, because as a federation, we don't have full labour market mobility. We talk about removing obstacles for workers, and some of those obstacles are actually the obstacles created by borders between provinces.

As I pointed out yesterday, when you look at regulated occupations here in the nation of Canada, in the Dominion of Canada—people like architects, engineers, veterinarians, audiologists, all these different professions—in fact, it is not always possible for someone who is trained and practises in one province to move to another province and put out their shingle, so to speak. Oftentimes, there are residency requirements, they have to undergo further training or there are reassessments that take place. There are these obstacles.

I made the point yesterday that an architect from Saskatchewan cannot simply move, in many cases, to every province across this country and begin practising his or her profession. I think all of us who have spent time travelling across this country know that buildings in Saskatchewan are as well-designed as buildings in Ontario. These types of obstacles are outdated. These types of obstacles hinder the competitiveness of this nation, and we've got to remove those obstacles.

So what Bill 175 would do—and there are complex parts of the bill. It obviously addresses a number of areas in terms of how we regulate various professions, but at its core it's actually very simple. It says that anyone in the nation of Canada who has fulfilled the training requirements and has been recognized as a practitioner in a regulated occupation anywhere in Canada can then move to another part of Canada and practise their trade or profession; that they don't need to go through further training or fulfill any of the requirements that I mentioned. Those obstacles are removed.

Do you know what? This is good news for Ontario. It's good news in two senses: First of all, it allows those individuals who are trained here in Ontario—those Ontarians who wish to move elsewhere in Canada—to have that freedom to go from place to place. But more importantly, Ontario is very much the economic engine of this country. Right now, of course, we're in a period of high unemployment, but when you look at the demographics going forward—as the population ages, in fact, experts tell us that we're going to have a skills shortage moving forward. We want to be able to welcome those individuals from all across Canada so they can come to Ontario, practise and be part of the workforce and the economy moving forward.

I think it was very prudent of us to take a leadership role in terms of labour mobility when the Premier sat down at the recent Council of the Federation meeting and said that this has to be a priority. It's a long time coming: I think I mentioned yesterday that 1994 was when the Agreement on Internal Trade was signed. People then were very hopeful that within a few years we'd have this sort of labour mobility. Finally we're going to have it, with the agreement between the provinces and, of course, the enabling legislation that's coming forward today that we're debating in the House and hopefully will move forward.

I should point out that in signing this agreement, in passing this legislation, for the vast majority of regulated professions you will be able to move from one province to another. But at the same time, the legislation that's before us—which corresponds with the agreement—actually gives provinces and territories the right to recognize that there may be exceptions. There may be instances where someone trained or practises in another province or jurisdiction and we do not recognize them automatically, as it would be in the vast majority of cases moving forward. This cannot be done just on a whim; this is not something that a province could simply sit down and decide: that profession X or profession Y will not be recognized here in the province. There are criteria for that, and I thought that it's important to put on the record what those criteria are.

The chapter in the Agreement on Internal Trade allows each province or territory to approve exceptions and maintain additional certification requirements for workers in specific occupations based on the following criteria, and I want to put them on the record here: "public security and safety, public order, protection of human, animal or plant life or health, protection of the environment, consumer protection, protection of the health, safety and well-being of workers," provision of adequate social and health services to all its geographic regions and "programs for disadvantaged groups."

In preparing for the legislation that we're looking at here before us and in follow-up to the discussions the Premiers had on the agreement that Ontario has signed on to, we took a look at all the regulated professions here in Ontario and reached out to every regulatory body: those that take care of architects, those that take care of veterinarians etc. We ran these criteria by them and asked for any concerns that they might have. In negotiating them through, we were undertaking the same process that other provinces were. The idea behind that—and what underpins this bill—is that every province will come forward with a list of exceptions, cases where they're not prepared to fully recognize a profession from another jurisdiction.

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The idea behind that is that Ontario—and the other provinces, for that matter—will be able to exercise their

right to call the exception. But it's also a challenge, because if someone says, for example, that profession X or profession Y from Ontario is not going to be recognized in Saskatchewan, well, that's a challenge to our government and a challenge, in the example I've given, to the government of Saskatchewan to sit down and over time work together to make sure we remove any of the concerns about the training that may take place so that labour mobility can go forward as smoothly as possible. So although there is the provision for exceptions and although every jurisdiction, I'm certain, will take advantage of that and put forward that list, that's a list which is going to be fluid. That's a list which will be used for negotiations moving forward.

Ontario, in the process of these discussions with the various regulatory bodies, has approved six exceptions, and I think it's important in the course of this debate that I put them on the record here for the House so that they know where we are not prepared to allow this full mobility.

First is in the area of dental hygienists—not in general, but dental hygienists from Yukon and Nunavut who have not graduated from a nationally accredited program must, in order to come to Ontario, complete the national or equivalent exam. This is a case where Yukon and Nunavut have a different training regime than you'd find here, and of course we're asking for that to be recognized. As I say, it's an opportunity for us to continue our discussions with Yukon and Nunavut and see if we can reach an agreement that hopefully—and this is our goal—removes that exception.

Drinking water systems operators: Certified operators from Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Northwest Territories must take Ontario's two-week drinking water systems training program, again where we've seen a real difference in training that has gone on but an area where we want to have further discussion with those jurisdictions.

Lawyers: I think this one will be common across the nation, because I think everyone recognizes that there is a different legal system in Quebec. Ontario will therefore require lawyers from that province to take additional training and/or examination. I think, based on the differing civil and common legal systems, that one will probably stand forever, but hopefully we will get down to just that one exception.

Public accountants: Ontario will assess the qualifications of workers against Ontario's public accounting certification requirements. While applicants with a chartered accountant designation can be assessed by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, applicants with either a certified general accountant or certified management accountant designation cannot be assessed until the Ontario regulatory authorities for their professions are authorized to grant public accounting licences.

The next one is registered practical nurses. Due to different training and education standards among provinces, registered practical nurses—in other words, licensed practical nurses—from Quebec must demonstrate that they have the necessary education and training in pediatrics and obstetrics. This is one that has been based on a lot of work done by the college of nurses in co-operation with Quebec, and, as I say, a point that we want to continue to pursue with Quebec, in this case, to make sure that eventually we can remove that exception.

Finally, social workers: Due to different training and education standards, social workers certified in Alberta and Saskatchewan must have their academic qualifications assessed by the relevant regulatory authority in Ontario.

Now, I've shared the list of the exceptions here with the House, and as I mentioned, if you went to other jurisdictions, you would find that they have a similar list. I want to point out that it's only six. We have about 300 regulated professions in this province, and we've narrowed it down to six where we can't have that perfect match.

I want to congratulate those authorities that are involved in dealing with regulated professions. They've come a long way to say, "Hey, there might be a little bit of a difference here and there might be a little bit of a difference there, but we recognize that there is a basic Canadian standard and we are prepared to open our borders, so to speak, to allow people from across the nation to move forward."

So the list that we're presenting today will be a basis for to us continue negotiation and discussion with other provinces. At the same time, they're going to be presenting their lists. I know there may be instances where they find Ontario professions—where they feel the standard is so great, where it meets the criteria that I shared with the Legislature a few minutes ago, that they'll want to make sure there are changes. In Ontario, we're not sure if we're always going to reach a consensus, but we're going to continue those discussions moving forward.

So the bill before us has, as I say, some technical provisions which are calling on all those regulatory authorities—in fact, enforcing these rules on these regulatory authorities. It's been based on a great deal of consultation with the various sectors. We've heard from them and we've held numerous meetings and discussions. The various ministers who are in charge of them—for example, the Attorney General in the area of accounting or the Minister of Health in the area of nursing that we've spoken about—have talked to the regulatory authorities. We've worked with them, and I think we have an excellent package moving forward, and a package which is very much about the economy.

I'll just end—I only have about 30 seconds—where I started: It's about the economy. It's about making sure that we have the most highly trained and highly skilled workforce, but that also means that they can go out and find those jobs, they can find those professions, across Canada. We're an important part of Canada. We're a province of Canada. We're part of a larger nation, and I think many people would, quite frankly, find it incredible that it's taken this long for us to do what is basically common sense: open our borders to all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to respond to the minister on his speech on Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities talked a bit about skill shortages perhaps happening in the future. On this side of the House, we've been trying to get the government to move on something that could give skilled workers an opportunity and bring them into the workforce, and that is apprenticeship ratios, something they could move on very easily.

In the electrical trade, for example, Ontario has a requirement that you have three journeymen for one apprentice, which makes it very difficult for companies to grow and bring on more apprentices and give them an opportunity, whereas in other provinces—just about all of them—it's one to one. So we'll be competing with those provinces that allow a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio, making it easier for people to become qualified in many trades. That's something that he really needs to address.

Just yesterday, I was talking to a young doctor, a medical student, who's in Ireland learning, obviously, to become a doctor. When she comes back to Ontario—and there are a lot of people who don't have a doctor in the province of Ontario. When that medical student hopefully comes back to Ontario, unfortunately, as far as I understand, even though they are from Ontario, they are in the same lineup to become qualified as somebody from any country in the world. That seems to me to be a real flaw, that we should be doing all we can to get that medical student back here and get them working in Ontario. So I hope the minister will address how the government might create a special line for Ontario—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to tell the minister that New Democrats oppose this bill, and we oppose it strongly. The minister presents it as if somehow this is a very easy matter that we should be solving, that people should be able to move about within the country because, ultimately, there are no standard differences between us and we should just be able to have people walk in and out without any problemo.

There is not a demonstrable need for this bill at all. Most of our problems have been resolved interprovincially. It's been done through a mix of interprovincial coordination, with programs such as the red seal, which works very well. These are things that we have been doing as a province that have been working. As far as I know, there are no problems, and where there have been, they have been solved, by and large.

We have groups of people working on this: the forum of labour market ministers, the labour mobility coordinating group. We have the mutual recognition agreements between provinces. These things have been there for a long time and they are working.

1640

The minister presents it as somehow an easy thing to fix, that it's simply common sense. He argues that, yes, there are some things the provinces could do to deal with problems with some other trade that might be coming from some other province. But I read on page 8 the following: "The Ontario regulatory authority shall ensure that its imposition of certification requirements on the individual under subsections (3), (4) and (5) and its imposition of terms, conditions or limitations on the individual's authorizing certificate under subsection (7) do not prevent the expeditious certification of the individual." It's about making sure that we do nothing to prevent somebody who comes from another province with a different standard from being able to practise here. That's what the purpose of the bill, as defined in this bill, is all about.

This is the only jurisdiction in Canada that is imposing tremendous fines on those who break the conditions of this law. It's the only province in Canada that imposes enforcement rules of five million bucks on some agency, governmental or otherwise, that is breaking the rules. No other province in Canada is doing this. It's incredible, in terms of what this government is doing to standards and how it's going to affect the standards of Ontario in particular.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to speak for a couple of minutes on this bill.

One of the things that I want to comment on: We signed an agreement on international trade back in 1994. No wonder some folks sometimes think the government moves slowly. This is just one of those examples.

In regard to this agreement, I'd just like to bring to the attention of the House and to the minister an example that I want to speak about. Not too long ago, a matter of a couple of years ago, one of the municipalities I represent called our office. They had a doctor who was from one of the eastern provinces. As you know, for a while we suffered a chronic shortage of mostly primary health care providers, like family docs. They had somebody from one of the eastern provinces who was interested in moving to Ontario, to one of my communities, but one of the big stumbling blocks was the rigmarole that this doctor had to go through in order to get status here in Ontario to practise. I mean, this doctor was good enough for one of the eastern provinces. Yes, we need to have those restrictions to protect from some other jurisdictions where maybe the health care professionals are not as knowledgeable as required by the standards we have here, but this was from one of our other provinces. I remember my staff working diligently with the ministry, trying to see how we could expedite this, but we didn't have the mechanism in order to do that.

I just use that as an example. This is a perfect way to elaborate on why this is so important and why it will play a big role in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to rise and speak on behalf of Bill 175, the labour mobility act. The PC Party, in theory, is the party of free trade. We will support any action that truly eliminates barriers to trade. We also believe that reducing barriers to trade will allow our businesses to grow in the province. This one step is not nearly enough.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: A competitive tax structure also needs to be put in place, as the Minister of Transportation well knows.

We are very concerned that this bill will reduce the level of training in many different professions and, in the short term, will make Ontario uncompetitive. Under this act, Ontario will be forced to recognize credentials from other Canadian jurisdictions. In regard to the construction trades, it may mean that people who want to become apprentices will move to other jurisdictions that have lower apprenticeship/journeyman ratios, just in order to train. We also think that over time, this act will put pressure on our licensing bodies to reduce—not improve, but reduce—training requirements to the lowest common denominator.

Now is the time for this government to reduce the apprenticeship ratios in order to help attract potential apprentices. Ontario should act before an exodus of students leaves our province and goes to other provinces.

Our community colleges and trades will suffer if people who want to go into the trades feel they have a better chance at training if they go out of this province. If the Ontario government wants to stop an exodus from happening in our apprenticeship and training system, they should act now to lower the ratios.

We have a number of other disagreements with this bill. I won't go into them at this time. We'll wait for further debate and we'll have them raised at that time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has up to two minutes to respond.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the comments that were shared by my colleagues. With the greatest respect to them—and I respect their opinions, and I respect this debate—there's a certain arrogance about what they're saying, from both parties across the way, in the sense of the standards that exist across Canada. I find it beyond puzzling that we are standing here today as part of a country that was formed in 1867, and an individual Canadian does not have the right to learn their profession in a given province and move to another province because somehow the standards are going to be different.

I'm not exactly sure what my colleagues in the opposition are frightened of. Quite frankly, a dentist who is trained in Saskatchewan, as far as I'm concerned, is a Canadian-trained dentist and has a right to practise anywhere—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Nepean–Carleton, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: The idea that somehow the standards are different elsewhere is, quite frankly, an outdated approach and it's one that is no longer prevalent, especially in this era of globalization, when Canada has to pull together as a single economy and compete with the likes of Brazil, China and India.

Mention has been made by a number of members about foreign-trained professionals coming to this country. We should be welcoming foreign-trained professionals into this country—I think everyone agrees—but how are we welcoming them when they come to a certain province, undertake the training and jump through all the hoops, and then if they want to move from Ontario to Quebec or Ontario to Saskatchewan or what have you, they have to go through more hoops?

It's time that we emerge into the 21st century, remove these barriers and make sure that Canada can function as a single economy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 175 today. I couldn't believe the minister describing the members on the opposite side of the House as arrogant. We've done everything we can to try to co-operate on bills that are of mutual interest.

What amazes me is that this bill was tabled on May 5 and we're only dealing with it at this point here in November. So you have to ask yourself what kind of priority it was. Or maybe the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities just doesn't have the clout in cabinet that some of those other members might—but now with George Smitherman gone, perhaps his star is going to rise. I know he was quite influential back in the days of the Chrétien government in Ottawa; you know, Chrétien and Gomery and all that kind of stuff. He was quite active with that government. He probably saw fit to decide to change his place of employment and move to the Ontario Legislature, and that's what we're seeing today with, of course, the former Minister of Health, who wants to be the mayor of Toronto.

I know I'm getting the evil eye from the Speaker here, because he's wondering what this has to do with labour mobility. But that's exactly what I'm talking about, Speaker: the freedom to be mobile within the province of Ontario, which the members of the Liberal Party have practised quite a bit lately—and we're seeing another example of it here in the city of Toronto. I do hope that the former Minister of Health and Minister of Energy and the current member for Toronto Centre is not going to forget that he still has constituents he has to represent. You don't just drop those people, start running for mayor of Toronto and forget about the people who elected you here. We certainly hope that he doesn't forget about his responsibility to those people as well, because that is important.

1650

On the bill, I want to thank our labour critic, Mr. Randy Hillier, but particularly our former labour critic, my good friend Bob Bailey from Sarnia–Lambton, who

did such a wonderful job in putting forth the position of the PC Party during earlier debate on this bill. Lucky for me, I have a copy of that speech. I had a chance to peruse it, and I just wanted to thank Bob again for the tremendous job he did and for all his work in making sure he understands the legislation when he's commenting on it in the House.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: John, his constituents are here and they'd like to hear what he said.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am aware that two of Bob's constituents are here; I thank the member for Trinity–Spadina for pointing that out. I was able to meet the constituents earlier, and I know that you introduced them to the House, didn't you, Bob? That's a great thing to do. Obviously, you have wonderful support in your riding when they'll travel all the way to Toronto to see you in action here in the House.

Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories: In principle, if you only listen to the minister—he's very good at getting his points across—you'd think, "My goodness gracious, this is the best thing, the best bill that maybe was ever introduced."

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, no. I said you'd think that. But we on other side of the House don't just listen to what the minister has to say; we actually listen to what the people out there have to say, and there are some issues with this bill. I will give them credit that we substantially agree with the principle of trying to allow people to have more mobility. This is one country—it's Canada—and we don't think we should have unwieldy barriers preventing people from having the choice to move from one province to another to seek employment.

In fact, over the last few years since 2003, when this government was elected, thank goodness that people have been able to look for jobs in other provinces than the one they currently reside in. If that wasn't the case, we would have had a real problem in Ontario, because we wouldn't have been able to accommodate all those people who were leaving, under the strangulating taxation policies of the Liberal government, to go to Saskatchewan and Alberta to get work.

But you'll notice that after being hammered incessantly about their policies by the Progressive Conservative Party and our new leader, Tim Hudak, they have changed their policy somewhat. They're now talking about reducing taxes to corporations, so that businesses can actually function.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, no, no, no; we're not against reducing taxes. The member for Algoma–Manitoulin says we're against reducing taxes—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —and the Speaker knows better than that. Our party has always been the party of lower taxation, so that we can create a vibrant, powerful economy that raises the standard of living for all those who live here and allows us to pay for and provide those essential services that are so important to each and every citizen of the province of Ontario.

Speaking of taxation and the citizens of the province of Ontario—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): As long as you relate it to the bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Okay. I'll be listening very carefully.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Of course, Mr. Speaker.

One thing I have learned in the six years I've been here is the rules, and I certainly—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I know that I'm compelled to speak to the matter at hand.

Anyway, getting back to the matter of taxation—and I'm going to get to how it relates to Bill 175 with respect to apprentices and all this kind of stuff—we have a real problem with the government's new bill to impose the biggest tax grab—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, you're not going to go there. You're not speaking about any new bills. You're speaking about the bill that's on the floor today.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's correct. Now, as a result of the government's failure to call for public consultation on the HST, we have no—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, no. I'll perhaps warn one or two more times, and then I'm going to move on to other speakers who are willing to speak on this bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You leave me no option, Speaker, but to either speak to the bill or move adjournment of the debate, and I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1656 to 1726.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm rather surprised at the outcome of that vote, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly tell you that. In fairness, Speaker—

Hon. Jim Watson: John, don't take it personally.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm not taking it personally, but I am a little bit concerned about the stringent nature of your call today on the bill. As you know, there are

times that I am as direct as possible, and there are times that it takes me a little longer to get to the point because I have to paint the picture. I think it is important sometimes that you frame the circumstances and the situation so that you can make it easier for the people who are listening out there in TV land to understand some of the challenges we have, not only with this bill but with the general nature of the agenda of the government of the day.

I'm sure, quite frankly, when our party was in government, that from time to time, members of the opposition would have had issues with the agenda of the day of that government. I was not a member of that government, as you would know, Mr. Speaker; I was only elected here in 2003—a lovely October evening. I remember it well.

Anyhow, on the bill, as I said earlier, our labour critic of the day who spoke to this bill some time ago, Mr. Bailey, my good friend from Sarnia–Lambton—and I know our critic today, the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Randy Hillier, has also indicated where we have agreement in principle on many of the issues in the bill, but there are still some issues that have yet to be resolved.

I know that the minister spoke about 300 different trades or whatever and only six that he said they couldn't seem to bring under the umbrella. We want to talk about one of those trades, the certified general accountants that have some problems with this legislation. So it's certainly not unanimous, but there are problems.

We've got other issues with regard to labour mobility. What about the apprenticeship ratios in this province, which we think are way out of whack with respect to the employment needs and service needs of the people? When you demand that you can only have one apprentice for a journeyman in certain fields, it's very hard to train the skilled workers of tomorrow if you have that kind of stringent legislation. And we know that that is nothing but a concession to the unions, because many of those young apprentices would like to train in non-union shops so that they can get their ticket under what some would feel are better circumstances; even under better training.

Again, getting back to the matter at hand, I don't want to delay it, because I have limited time here. But I want to remind the House that we have a great deal of problems, and I know the government House leader, who's here now too, has problems with some of the tools that we're using to ensure that our voices are heard.

We have a responsibility as Her Majesty's loyal opposition to be heard. Government is not about dictatorship, where you win the most seats and then you just do whatever the heck you want to do and forget about what the people are saying back to you.

The people have some real concerns out there, and you're not allowing those concerns to be heard—those concerns need to be heard on your HST legislation—because you refuse to go to public hearings across this province in every town that demands them. The people have a right to put forth their views and their opposition to what you're doing, and maybe even understand better what the legislation is all about, because yes, there will be some who support it. But because you refuse to shed the light of day on it and face the people—that's what governing and democracy is all about, facing the people—I have no option but to move for adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the "nays" have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1732 to 1802.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All of those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 9; the nays are 39.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

I beg the indulgence of the House so that I can wish my bride of 48 years a happy anniversary.

Even though we're 360 kilometres apart, I want to tell her I love her.

Applause.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, if she has put up with you for 48 years, I feel like I love her too.

Laughter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Okay. Thank you.

Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made, and we now have a late show, or two or three.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier. The member for Whitby–Oshawa.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This morning during question period, I asked the Premier about the fact that the Minister of Health had previously identified the cost of the sole-source contract handed to McKinsey by the government as $750,000. Well, we've heard that McKinsey is reported not to accept retainers of under $1 million.

This government has already been implicated on numerous occasions of bending the rules of spending as they see fit and as suits their purposes. The public was appalled to learn about the eHealth scandal, and slowly

but surely the public is finding that this reckless misappropriation of taxpayer money is not isolated to eHealth Ontario.

The people of Ontario were astounded to find that Ron Sapsford, the soon-to-be-former deputy minister, was paid a salary which was funded through Hamilton Health Sciences, a hospital. And it doesn't stop there. The assistant deputy minister to the Premier, Hugh MacLeod, and the ADM to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade were also both paid through the University Health Network. The public want to know why.

In doing some research, I found that salaries paid to senior health bureaucrats are done in this manner because they have "enhanced pensions" for senior executives. That still brings me to the question of why a management and consulting firm would need to be paid through a hospital budget. I think that's something of great interest to the people of the province of Ontario. Do businesses need cushy retirement plans too, or was the Sudbury hospital a convenient venue to use to disburse money for an untendered contract?

As we know, hospitals have not been subject to FOI legislation, which would make the likelihood of the opposition and the people of Ontario uncovering one more scandal that much less likely.

What I can say is that Sudbury Regional Hospital is not in a position to be funding sole-source government contracts, nor, for that matter, are any of our Ontario hospitals that are struggling to make ends meet and provide service with the resources that they have, and they should be using them to provide the direct care to patients that I'm sure they all want to be doing.

In this case, what's most likely the case is that this government is just continuing along its destructive path of unaccountable, non-transparent operations. We've heard a lot about how they're transparent and open, but every opportunity that this government has to show that they are open and transparent, they turn their backs on.

As it stands today, our caucus is waiting for the Sudbury hospital staff to receive approval to release documents relating to contracts paid to McKinsey. I can only assume, because they told us before that they had some information but they needed approval to release it, that it has been stopped in its tracks. "Why?" one might ask. Because Premier McGuinty and the Liberals will not have anyone see those contracts if they have anything to say about it.

The facts remain that this government, after promising not to raise taxes in the 2003 campaign, implemented what we all know today as the Ontario health tax. This government then funded that money not directly into health care but into general revenue, where it was spent on many non-health-related projects. This is just one more thing that Ontarians have to thank McGuinty economic mismanagement for. The people of Ontario yet again are spending more money for health care services and getting less, while Liberal friends are collecting the difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The parliamentary assistant to the Premier.

Mr. David Ramsay: I just have to start off and say that the member from Whitby–Oshawa is absolutely wrong, on all counts, in what she has presented today.

She's wrong to say that Sudbury Regional Hospital paid for the McKinsey report. That is absolutely wrong. The $750,000 was paid for by the Ministry of Health, and Minister Matthews has been completely transparent about this contract. The ministry paid for this to develop the implementation of a new drug system, and with this, we are not looking at reducing drug benefits for Ontarians, but increasing those benefits for seniors and those on social assistance. We have increased access to drugs so we get better value for the money for our taxpayers.

1810

McKinsey helped with the research and analysis that led to a discussion paper presented to our industry partners in July of this year, and it is available on the Ministry of Health website. We are working with our partners to increase the number of drugs, drive down the prices and provide greater accountability and transparency.

Bill 102 leverages our drug program to get better value for money and gives better access to the medications that Ontarians need. Changes have led to almost $700 million in savings that have been reinvested in the health care system. We have added 682 new drugs to the formulary since Bill 102 came into effect. That includes 177 brand name drugs and 505 generic products, 35 of those being cancer drugs that are now listed. Low-income seniors are exempted from the $100 yearly deductible and pay only the $2 co-pay per prescription.

We have increased funding for cancer drugs from $72 million when we first took office in 2003-04 to a forecast, at the end of this fiscal year, $195 million. Herceptin, Avastin and Vectibix are all now listed, with more than $100 million over three years to provide coverage for Lucentis.

We have sped up the review process to make breakthrough drugs available for Ontarians. We're doing our job for the health of the people of this province.

TAXATION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Nepean–Carleton has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier.

The member for Nepean–Carleton, you have up to five minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to discuss my dissatisfaction with the Premier's answer today, and it was a very important question that I had asked.

On Monday evening, after the HST legislation was introduced in this chamber, I and two of my colleagues attended a briefing by the Ministry of Finance. We asked, through one of our researchers, at the end of the very long and drawn-out briefing, which lasted for about two and a half hours, what impact the HST would have on

physicians' offices and, by extension, what that cost would mean to the health care system.

It troubled us to learn that the Ministry of Finance did not have an estimate of what this HST will cost our medical system. In fact, family physicians across Ontario have come out against the HST. They are angered at the introduction of the sales tax because they feel that while the government wasted precious health care dollars at eHealth, their fees are going to go up in the face of it, because of the HST. So we know that they are incensed.

We've been asking, of course, for public consultation. I asked the Premier of Ontario and he refused to answer. In fact, he was so callous outside of this Legislature as to suggest that anyone opposed to the HST should write a letter to the editor or should call a talk show. That is disgusting. He is not allowing Ontario's patients, nor is he allowing Ontario's doctors, to not only come to this chamber but also to go to their communities, whether that is Kingston, Cornwall, Windsor, London or Scarborough, whether it's North Bay, Thunder Bay, Sarnia or Sudbury. He's going to halt public input into this legislation.

Meanwhile, doctors across Ontario are concerned. They are concerned because their medical supplies are going to increase by 8%. Their medical journals are going to increase by 8%. Their hydro is going to go up by 8%. Their Internet access fees are going to go up by 8%. Their legal and accounting fees are going to go up by 8%. And that is going to be passed on to the taxpayer of this province. It's going to make the medical system in this province more expensive, and it's not right.

In addition to that, the McGuinty Liberals will be adding 8% more to kids' sports registration, 8% more to vitamins, and 8% more to gym membership fees. We're making health care in this province unaffordable not only because of the mismanagement at eHealth but also because of this ill-timed, ill-conceived harmonized sales tax.

We're going to continue to fight this tooth and nail. We're using every procedural tactic that's available to us to prolong the debate so Ontarians, their families, their doctors, their neighbours and their friends can take part in probably one of the most important debates since this Legislature was brought forward after the last election. We'll often hear on the other side that this is the single most important thing they can do for the economy, yet it is the single most important thing that they want to hide from Ontarians.

As I close, I'm urging all Ontarians to join the fight against the HST. They should write their MPP and send an e-mail to their friends. They should go to daltonsalestax.com. They should also call the Premier of Ontario. His phone number is 613-736-9573. I think Ontarians need to send a message to this Premier, and I repeat: 613-736-9573. Mr. McGuinty will be happy to hear from you.

Hon. John Gerretsen: What was that number again?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Apparently, his front bench doesn't get the number, so I'll repeat it one more time for Mr. Gerretsen: 613-736-9573. Mr. McGuinty will be happy to hear your opposition to the harmonized sales tax.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The parliamentary assistant to the Premier.

Mr. David Ramsay: I'm very pleased to be able to stand up and represent the Premier today in response to this. I have to say to the member and everybody on the other side that Ontario has been a very, very lucky jurisdiction in where we sit geographically. We're blessed with natural resources. We're blessed with sitting beside the largest trading partner in the world. We basically very easily took advantage of all that and developed a wonderful economy in this province that we're all very, very proud of.

But, you know, the world has changed, and to adapt to that change, Premier McGuinty has said, "I'd better do something bold and innovative that will rejuvenate this economy again as it rebounds." You know something? It might not be the most popular thing, but that's what leadership is about. Leadership is to ask: What is the best for the citizens of this province?

The best thing we can do is to harmonize the two sales taxes that are out there that basically cascade with each other, that cost our manufacturers and other producers—put them in a very inefficient system, cascading those taxes, making our products very expensive on the world's trading stage. That is the right thing to do: to fundamentally retool our whole taxation system.

To offset that, we have brought in $15 billion of tax cuts. Basically, what we're doing is realigning how we tax our population to provide the services that government needs to do for its citizenry. So what we're doing is basically increasing the consumption tax and lowering the income tax. I would think my Conservative colleagues would be very happy that we are giving citizens more freedom to spend the money that they're going to keep from their paycheques. When they consume something, they are going to pay a tax on it, but they are going to be retaining more of their tax money and can make decisions about whether they purchase something or maybe invest into something or just save their money where they wouldn't be taxed. So they're going to get more freedom in how to do that.

I'd like to read a couple of quotes here about this. They're actually quite learned quotes. One says, "Now, I know that some business leaders support the harmonized sales tax, and to be clear, I believe that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate sets of taxes and policies and collect two separate groups of sales tax." That's one quote; that was from April of this year.

From the same person, another quote: "You know, well, we understand that ... you can relieve some of the taxes on businesses, right? In the manufacturing sector," for instance, "the problem with the PST is it cascades, so every step along the way there's tax on tax on tax, which raises the cost of goods and particularly punishes exporters. So we understand how" a harmonized sales tax "can help the economy." That was Tim Hudak. That was Tim Hudak from March of this very year.

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I have quotes here from this year from Frank Klees during the leadership debate and Bob Runciman, who was the interim leader.

So it would seem to me that the senior members of this particular opposition party were all in agreement for this to happen until, of course, it was our government that decided they were right; it was the right thing to do, and we had the gumption to go ahead and do it. It may not be the most popular thing to do, but it's the right thing to do, and it will eventually turn around the Ontario economy.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

The member for Haldimand–Norfolk, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I do thank the Legislature for this opportunity to elicit a response from the McGuinty government as to whether they were paying the Haldimand hydro billings for this house in Caledonia that was overrun three and a half years ago and remains occupied by militant activists. With the Premier and the aboriginal affairs minister refusing to answer whether the government was actually paying the utilities at this occupied house, I found I had to fill in the blanks and indicate that they are footing the electricity bill, from the information that I have. But I would like that confirmed. I did see the minister following the lead of his leader with respect to a duck-the-question strategy, and the minister, too, attempted to sidetrack the question by suggesting—or he started to suggest—he couldn't answer, as he felt I was "getting very close to an ongoing lawsuit." Well, that went over like a lead balloon in the Legislature, and the Speaker, at the time, had to stop the clock on two separate occasions as pandemonium broke out in the Legislature.

After the minister made another stab at ultimately failing to address the question—it's all in Hansard—I therefore filed this request for a late show.

As we know, on February 28, 2006, the subdivision in Caledonia—it's known as Douglas Creek Estates or Dalton Creek Estates—was forcefully occupied, and since that time it has served as a base, a jumping-off point, for three and a half years of lawlessness, intimidation, harassment, trespassing and, as I mentioned this morning, attempted murder.

Three and a half years ago the McGuinty government purchased the property, and during those three and a half years, someone—I would like to find out—has been providing water and electricity to this occupied house.

I do reflect on the latter phrase in the Speaker's prayer, something we're lacking in Caledonia: "Inspire us to decisions which establish and maintain a land of prosperity and righteousness, where freedom prevails and where justice rules."

People living and doing business in that area do not feel that is the case. They have been subjected to arson, extortion, barricades, land seizures, occupations, militant protests and related harassment and intimidation and, as I mentioned, mob violence and threats to public safety. This has to end. This must not be encouraged by a government providing free electricity, free water, and perhaps free cable or natural gas or garbage pickup.

The result of this occupation is that the community safety and social and economic life in the area have declined. There is a climate of fear—I am there very, very regularly—chaos and uncertainty generated by this intimidation and these documented acts of lawlessness.

I mentioned that the site is under the flag of the Mohawk Warriors. We know from an OPP officer that that is an organization that is described as a "lawless group, usually armed, with a reputation akin to the Hells Angels." We know that on April 20, 2006, the OPP were driven from this site during a pitched battle that involved hockey sticks, axes, sledgehammers, baseball bats, two-by-fours and bags with rocks.

My concern, Mr. Speaker: By continuing to pay the water and electricity bills—I certainly asked this morning—what is this government doing? What is the Premier doing? Perhaps the minister will answer this question specifically now, during this late show: Minister, what are you doing—that's the first question I've asked you directly, because people have felt the answers are not there—about the perception out there that your government is supporting and condoning activities of militant lawbreakers? More specifically, when will you stop sticking taxpayers with these utility bills coming from that house located on Douglas Creek Estates, a house occupied by militants?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by congratulating you and your wife on your anniversary. I know there's no place you'd rather be, but hopefully you'll be able to make it out there tonight and see her; if not, soon.

The member knows, and I responded to the question today in question period, that the Ontario Realty Corp. is responsible for managing and maintaining the lands that we're talking about, including the payment of utility bills, on behalf of the owner, which is the government of Ontario, until a go-forward strategy is determined. As owners of the Douglas Creek Estates, we continue to incur costs to maintain the site until the future use of the property is determined in a manner that's agreeable to all parties. But I've got to say that it has been a long time since I've seen something as disgraceful in this place as a member of the party opposite—and it shouldn't surprise me, but it does—comparing aboriginals to Hells Angels. That is totally, totally irresponsible. It's something that I think is beneath the member and beneath his party.

When it comes to First Nations issues, when you look at the track record of six years and beyond, we were at

the lowest level when it came to a relationship with our aboriginal people here in this province, the lowest level of any province in the entire country. We were seen at the very, very bottom. Today, six years later, we are the leaders in this country when it comes to the provinces and the territories, and we're seen right across this nation as a province that's taking leadership on these very, very important issues. That stands in stark contrast to the approach taken by those guys over there. And it's working because we're working in partnership. We're going to partnér with First Nations communities, with Six Nations in his area, with local municipalities in those areas and with the business community to promote the opportunities that are available for aboriginal people in this province. Again, that stands in contrast to the shameful approach taken in the past.

That being said, I have a few questions for the member opposite. His community is going through a tough time right now, both economically and socially. There are tensions in that community that are still in place from the events of a number of years ago. We recognize that, but does he not think that locally elected leaders, such as himself, have a responsibility to work with everybody involved to try to bring people together, to try to heal those wounds? Does he not think he has a responsibility to do that? I know that his neighbour Dave Levac, the MPP for Brant, does. I know he's working tirelessly, bringing parties together, bringing businesses into the community, trying to create partnerships with Six Nations, economic development opportunities, working with local municipalities—Brant, the county of Haldimand—working with the city of Brantford, doing all he can to try to create those partnerships, and he's doing a darn good job of it. And what has this member done? Nothing.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I've never heard him at any time, in the year that I've been Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, make one single, solitary effort or utter a word that contributes to bringing people together. I think that's absolutely irresponsible. I ask him to look at the communities in his area; look at the local municipal leaders. They're pulling together. They're creating partnerships with Six Nations. They're moving ahead. I haven't heard one note, I haven't heard one word of encouragement from him at all as they work together to try to heal those wounds, to try to move forward together. Instead, I get questions in the House that I can't help but say are questions that are devised to try to exploit those divisions rather than to try to bring people together. That's not leadership. That's being irresponsible.

Thirdly, I ask him this question: When has he gone to the federal government? All we're talking about here is a 200-year-old federal land claim. When has he stood up to the federal government? He has a federal partner in his riding, Diane Finley, who's a Conservative member of Parliament. What has he done to encourage them to get these talks going?

We're calling for mediators. We're doing everything within our power to try to encourage the federal government to take these negotiations more seriously and make progress. We're trying to work with the local leaders, the local partners in the area and Six Nations to make that happen. He has done nothing to get progress there.

It's not too late. We're willing to accept your help in doing this. We need your support; so does your community. You've been missing in action up until now, but there's still time. We still need all local leaders to pull together and join together with us in creating partnerships.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday morning, November 19.

The House adjourned at 1831.

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
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Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
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Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

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Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
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Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
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Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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Government
Publications

No. 189

Nº 189

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 19 November 2009

Jeudi 19 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 19 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 19 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Sikh prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: I gave notice to your office yesterday afternoon, so you're aware of this. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to expand on that letter. For the benefit of those who are not aware of its contents, I will repeat some of the points that I made to you, Speaker, in writing yesterday.

Pursuant to standing order 21(c), I have provided the Speaker with the required written notice to raise this point of privilege here this morning. I'll share with the House specific reasons why the joint provincial-federal agreement on the harmonized sales tax and the government's refusal to hold full public consultations in communities across this province contravenes standing order 21(a).

Just like in hockey, or in any other sport, we have rules on our playing surface that guide us as we speak or vote in this Legislature. Standing order 21(a) says that the House collectively, and its MPPs individually, enjoy rights conferred by the Legislative Assembly Act and other statutes, "or by practice, precedent, usage and custom." These rights are listed in many parliamentary manuals, but for the sake of brevity, Speaker, I'm only going to refer to Marleau and Montpetit, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, which states: "The House has the authority to invoke privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties." So in simpler terms, we as MPPs individually, or as a group, have the right to come here to represent our constituents to the best of our ability. And we can't do our jobs when our hands are being tied. We can't do our jobs when we and the people of this province are being denied full public consultations. That's when we question whether or not democracy is working and why we are even here. The legislation required to implement the harmonized sales tax, Bill 218, has already—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Excuse me, both members, for a moment. A proper notice of point of privilege was filed with the Speaker. I'm going to give the member the opportunity to speak to his point of privilege. I would encourage him not to engage in debate and to stick to the points that he's raised, but I will hear the honourable member through.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thank you, I appreciate that you are prepared to hear me out. As I said, I'm not going to extend the discussion with respect to this, but I think it is important to put some of these points in terms of the point that I'm raising because they are relevant. Once this harmonized sales tax bill is passed, some of its measures will take effect January 1, 2010. We know the government is going to pursue swift and speedy passage of some of the elements of the bill.

As currently written, Bill 218 incorporates the harmonized sales tax agreement which locks in the province for at least five years. That's important in terms of my point of privilege. It's locking in the province for at least five years. Under this legislation, Bill 218, there is no chance to reduce the provincial sales tax rate until after the first two years. There's no chance to manoeuvre on exemptions, because the agreement limits harmonized sales tax exemptions in the province to a total of only 5% of the estimated GST base in Ontario.

While House precedent suggests that constitutional matters be left to the courts, it's worth mentioning that section 92 of the Constitution Act says that provincial Legislatures may exclusively make laws in relation to "direct taxation within the province in order to the raising of a revenue for provincial purposes."

With the federal government so involved in our direct taxation under the harmonized sales tax, we can't help but question—I can't help but question—the constitutionality of the harmonized sales tax agreement signed by Minister Duncan. It contradicts our traditional division of powers between provincial legislatures and the federal government.

Under our system of parliamentary democracy, governments are granted power by the will of the people for four years only. In fact, this government itself introduced and passed legislation to go with the four-year term and fixed elections. Yet now, with this harmonized sales tax agreement, this government is attempting to extend their mandate from potentially beyond the political grave on such a sweeping issue without the required support of the electorate. It's an affront to voters and a democratic travesty to the system under which we serve them. MPPs

today, but especially those elected in October 2011, will be obstructed in the performance of their duties, rendered powerless to act on behalf of their constituents who need harmonized sales tax issues raised. By limiting the authority of future governments to make change, the future of this province will have been determined by its past. Democracy will move backward instead of forward.

Unfortunately, our collective efforts to advance democracy with the harmonized sales tax issue are slipping, as I speak. As you know, in my view, and our view, we are being obstructed in the execution of our functions by the government's refusal to hold public consultations—full public consultations—in communities across the province.

According to Marleau-Montpetit, financial procedures adopted by the Canadian House of Commons in 1867 were formed by several principles including, and I quote from Marleau and Montpetit, "that all legislation sanctioning expenditure or initiating taxation is to be given the fullest possible discussion, both in the House and in committee."

This principle was promoted to ensure that, "Parliament may not, by sudden and hasty votes, incur any expenses, or be induced to approve of measures, which may entail heavy and lasting burdens upon the country."

0910

The last part of this quote is particularly applicable and shows great foresight into the situation we are facing here today. We know—and the people of this province know—that the harmonized sales tax will be a heavy and lasting burden for all of us to bear. They knew back in 1867 the importance of full debate and public input to taxation issues, and it's nothing short of a disgrace that 142 years later, this government is denying full committee and also, likely, full debate in this House on a life-altering taxation bill.

Not only do the constraints of the harmonized sales tax agreement handcuff MPPs today and in the future, they also limit the extent to which people can object if full committee were to be held since exemptions are capped.

It boils down to this: Cutting out critical consultations and making long-lasting decisions beyond a people-sanctioned term of office makes everyone irrelevant except the governing party. People don't matter. Opposition MPPs don't matter; even the House and its long-standing traditions of business don't matter. The only thing that seems to matter to the government is fast-tracking Bill 218 to passage.

On this harmonized sales tax issue, we can no longer do our job individually as members; we can no longer do our job collectively as Her Majesty's loyal opposition. I'm sure the third party, the NDP, shares this view. When the opposition can no longer serve as an effective check and balance to government on an issue of such importance to the public and the province's future, democracy simply doesn't exist.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I'm asking you today, on behalf of all of my colleagues in the official opposition, to help restore democracy to this chamber with a favourable ruling. Should you rule that this matter is a prima facie case of privilege, I would be prepared to move the following motion. I won't read it—I don't want to incur your wrath, Speaker, but it deals with cancellation of the agreement.

The impact of this tax will be felt by people of all ages, by people from all parts of this province, by people in all professions and by people of all income levels. This tax won't discriminate. Over and over again, you'll be paying it. It's wide-reaching. People should have input—their representatives in this place should have input.

In closing, I would like to quote the words of the writ of summons for one of the councils of Parliament dated 1295—

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm quoting, Speaker, if you can hear me over the interjections from the Liberal benches: "What touches all, should be approved by all."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, I plan not to take a long time; I just want to add a couple of things to what was said earlier. I'm responding to the point of privilege obviously brought forward by the member from Leeds–Grenville with respect to a possible violation of standing order 21(a). What needs to be determined here is if the decision introduced by Bill 218 to implement the HST makes a prima facie case of privilege that requires your ruling.

At the heart of matter is the question of encumbrance of future governments. What we know is that the McGuinty government is set to enter into a tax harmonization agreement with the federal government that has implications that will extend well beyond the current mandate, and that was laid out by Mr. Runciman.

Here are the facts: The agreement in principle locks the province into a defined tax structure for a minimum of five years, despite the fact that less than two years remain in their mandate. Additionally, the cap on exemptions imposes further limits on the province's ability to use its taxation powers to address future issues. A future government would not be able, for example, to say in order to stimulate the economy that they want to reduce the PST. You couldn't do that as a future government. You would not be able to exempt certain products that are currently exempted under the PST. Should a new government be elected, it would handcuff the ability of the newly elected government to do so.

I want to draw to your attention one particular issue that is fairly serious in part of my riding. As you know, I represent many First Nations. Currently, under the provincial tax laws, First Nations people who have status have the ability—I'm just wondering what's going on; all of a sudden, I see everybody running to one end of the Legislature—to have a point-of-sale exemption when it comes to being able to purchase a product. If you live on a reserve and you want to buy a product, you are exempt from having to pay PST as a point-of-sale exemption. Under the new HST rules, that point-of-sale exemption

will no longer exist. A future government—for example, if we were to form the next government or the Conservatives were to form the next government—couldn't try to reverse that and give First Nations what they had at the beginning. It really handcuffs the ability of future governments to do anything when it comes to moving on changes to this particular tax provision after the next election.

Clearly such a move violates parliamentary procedure by binding the legislative capacity of future Parliaments. In light of the sudden shift of the global economy and the effects that the downturn has had on the fiscal capacity of governments around the world, the implications of taking away the key tool of taxation power from future administrations is not only significant because of its contravention of parliamentary principle. Ironically, as governments applied a wide variety of approaches to address the current fiscal crisis, even those they had previously disparaged, the McGuinty government would undoubtedly have an adverse impact on the assembly's ability to act in the face of a future crisis.

That is an important point that we need to take into consideration. We cannot handcuff a future Legislature from being able to deal with what will possibly be different circumstances that require different reactions when it comes to tax policy.

Given the marked decline of provincial financial capacity and the accepted wisdom that the government needs access to a variety of tools available to help weather financial storms, the gravity of the decision to take steps toward harmonization becomes painfully evident. In a parliamentary democracy, we accept that the mandate provided by the electorate only applies to a set time frame.

The action proposed in Bill 212 becomes doubly egregious when the McGuinty government decision to limit public consultation on the bill is taken into consideration. In Montpetit, on page 701, quoted earlier by my friend Mr. Runciman—I'm not going to go back and quote the entire page, because I don't want to take the time to do that, but I just want to say that the point is that when we set up the taxation regimes in our Parliaments, it was clear that the direction we were given by the framers was that "all legislation sanctioning expenditure or initiating taxation is to be given the fullest possible discussion, both within the House and in committee."

What is at point here is that the government wants to pass this legislation before the House rises in about three weeks' time. That is going to limit the ability of this House to have meaningful discussion on this particular bill. Number two, and more importantly, it's going to limit the ability of the public, those people affected either positively or negatively—I would argue more negatively, as a result of the new HST rules that are going to be put in place in this new regime. So I would argue that there needs to be an ability for the public to have its say, and the process that the government is choosing is very much going to limit that.

I say, Speaker, that this is a serious point of privilege. It's one that we would ask you to take your time to rule on and not to call that bill for debate until such time as you have had the ability to respond to the House more fully later.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As I'm sure you expect, Speaker, I vehemently disagree with the members from Leeds–Grenville and Timmins–James Bay. This is not a point of privilege.

Bill 218 has been introduced in the House as a piece of legislation. It will be debated; it will have fulsome debate. If we weren't spending a great deal of time talking about innocuous points of privilege this morning, we would have time to debate it this morning.

This point of privilege did not, in fact, raise any violation of privilege. I listened intently to the member from Leeds–Grenville and there was, in fact, no violation of any privilege of a member of this Legislature being referred to, although there was a great deal of debate about Bill 218. There is nothing in this bill that violates a privilege of a member.

I would remind the members opposite of their signing of the 407 agreement, which handcuffed this government—some of the members across are wincing and coughing—and handcuffed governments of the future for years and years, an agreement that was entered into by that government.

There are countless other examples of agreements that are entered into by governments that last longer than the life of the government. As well, there are many tax measures that last longer than any life of a government that are introduced by governments in succession and continue to exist for years to come. The agreement that was reached between the government of Canada and the government of Ontario acknowledges and requires that both Houses pass the legislation required to enforce the agreement.

This agreement was signed by our Minister of Finance and the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, who is a friend and colleague and very close acquaintance to many on the other side. They are fully aware that the agreement was signed by both, and that both Houses, including the federal House of Parliament, will have to pass legislation to implement this arrangement.

The member opposite has raised a question of constitutionality. Mr. Speaker, as you are only too clearly aware, a constitutional question is not a question of privilege and is not to be raised in this House. There are courts to look at questions of constitutionality. If the opposition should choose to take that challenge and challenge Mr. Flaherty's decision and signature, they are more than welcome to do that.

As I said previously, many agreements and, certainly, many pieces of legislation exceed the mandate of Legislatures, and in no way is that a violation of privilege.

Here, the agreement that was reached between the Ministers of Finance requires that both Houses pass legislation to implement that agreement. Both Houses will be

introducing legislation; we have. Bill 218 is now before the House, to be debated without further delay.

I would ask that you not find that there has been any privilege violated, because I don't believe there has been. Certainly it does not violate the rules that have been introduced today in this discussion. I would ask that we continue with debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the member for Leeds–Grenville, the member for Timmins–James Bay and the government House leader. I'm going to recess this House for 10 minutes.

The House recessed from 0922 to 0939.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank, once again, the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from Timmins–James Bay and the government House leader for their submissions. I will be reserving my ruling. In the meantime, Bill 218 is properly before the House and is in order, so if it is the order of the day, I will allow it to be called.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Ted Arnott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have an urgent and valid point of order, I would contend. It's based on my understanding of the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, if members would turn to page 48, part XVIII, it appears, standing order 99(d). On September 15, 2009—that would be how many months ago? About a month ago, I guess—the member for Whitby–Oshawa, my colleague in the Legislature, submitted the following order paper question: "Would the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please provide the annual reports and detailed financial statements for the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres for each fiscal year beginning from 2004-05 to the present?"

As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, standing order 99(d) reads as follows: "The minister shall answer such written questions within 24 sessional days, unless he or she indicates that more time is required because the answer will be costly or time-consuming or that he or she declines to answer, in which case a notation shall be made on the orders and notices paper following the question indicating that the minister has made an interim answer, the approximate date that the information will be available, or that the minister has declined to answer, as the case may be."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): To the honourable member from Wellington–Halton Hills: In consultation with the table, that is a valid point of order. That question is overdue. I would suggest to the government House leader that there be communication undertaken with the Ministry of Health to ensure that the member from Whitby–Oshawa receives a prompt answer to that. I thank the member for that valid point of order.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I do have more information here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No. I have just ruled that you have raised a valid point of order and that the information is overdue, according to the standing orders. As I have done on other occasions in this House, I have urged and will follow through with the government House leader that that response is properly attended to.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm sorry; I couldn't hear what you said, Mr. Speaker. My microphone wasn't working.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will repeat it again for the honourable member. You have a valid point of order. The question is overdue and I am asking that the government House leader instruct the Minister of Health to ensure that that answer is given to the question to the member from Whitby–Oshawa, who raised that question and put it on the order paper.

The Minister of Finance on a point of order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I move second reading of Bill 218, An Act to—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I didn't say it was a point of order, Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 218, An Act—

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: He hasn't called orders of the day yet.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Orders of the day have not been called.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This point of order is for the purpose of seeking clarification and ruling from the Speaker on standing order 110(a) and standing order 108(h).

Standing order 108(h) reads: "Standing Committee on Public Accounts which is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the report of the Auditor General and the public accounts, which documents shall be deemed to have been permanently referred to the committee as they become available."

Standing order 110(a) reads: "Standing and select committees shall be severally empowered to examine, inquire into and report from time to time on all such matters as may be referred to them by the House."

Specifically, Speaker, I am asking you to provide specific guidance as to what the words "examine" and "inquire" mean in the context of the public accounts committee. We know that the work of committees, both standing and select, have done and continue to do great work which is much service to this place and to the people of Ontario. As we know, committees do more than just review bills as part of the legislative process, and the public accounts committee is one such example.

In October 2009, the Auditor General released his special report on Ontario's electronic health records initiative—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable member to get to the point of his point of order and provide the House, and me, with the specific point, not generalities.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Okay, Speaker. It's going to take me just a moment to go through it to find where the specifics are, but I will work toward that.

The public accounts committee met on October 21 and 28 and November 4 and 18. The committee was unanimous in its agreement to invite the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask that the honourable member provide the Chair immediately with what is out of order before this House at this moment.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I can give the clerks' table a copy of the point of order, if they'd like.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That being the case, if you have information that would assist the Speaker in providing a ruling, I would welcome that submission to be made to me and will reserve judgment on my ruling on your point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You have information that you're going to provide to me on your point of order?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Yes, and I will read you the conclusions so that it makes sense.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Read me the conclusions.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Okay. Just one second. There was one aspect where it was specifically stated that the government members on the committee on public accounts specifically stated that it was a government rule and government tradition that only sitting members and current members within agencies are allowed to present before the committee.

These are the questions I wish you to answer, or have answered: Is the public accounts committee precluded from inviting former government employees to appear before it when it—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As the honourable member knows, items that are dealt with at committee, including points of order—I do not have the ability to rule on an item that is at committee. Those issues must be dealt with at the committee level.

I am going to ask that the honourable member come to his conclusion very quickly.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: What I'm asking you to review is this: Is the public accounts committee precluded from inviting former government employees to appear before it when considering a report from the Auditor General?

As well, I would ask you to rule on this: Is the public accounts committee precluded from inviting private individuals to appear before it when considering a report of the Auditor General?

What we are trying to do here is ensure that those individuals, and we, are in compliance with the guidelines of the House. I'm asking you to make an official ruling so that all individuals specifically know what is allowed and what is not allowed.

A number of statements have been made by government members which specifically stated that individuals—

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would just direct the Speaker and the member to look at—

Interjections.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Let me finish the sentence, Ted—to look at standing order—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the honourable member from Oshawa for his point of order. I welcome his submission and the information he has provided, and I will rule on that point of order on a subsequent date.

I have the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I apologize if my colleagues do not let me finish the sentence. I would just ask the Speaker to look at standing order 13(d)—perhaps this is pertinent to the discussions this morning—"A member raising a point of order or point of privilege, and any member permitted by the Speaker to speak ... must put the point tersely and speak only to the point raised. A point of order or privilege is heard in silence by the House." I would just ask the Speaker that this be enforced.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the government House leader for the point of order.

I allowed the honourable member to make his point. I've ruled on that: I've asked the honourable member to provide me with additional information and I will rule on that.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Government order G218.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will remind honourable members that, yes, orders of the day was called. When I called orders of the day, the honourable member from Leeds–Grenville rose on his point of order with the notice that he had properly provided to me in advance.

The Minister of Finance.

0950

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Mr. Duncan moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate? The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

I'm pleased today to lead off second reading on Bill 218, the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009. As I indicated, sir, I will be sharing my time today with my parliamentary assistant, Mr. Wayne Arthurs.

As outlined in the recent 2009 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, the current global downturn has had a significant impact on Ontario families and businesses. This, in turn, has led to a decline in government revenues, as well as an increase in demand for government services. Faced with this challenge, the government has proposed bold new initiatives that would improve Ontario's competitiveness in attracting business investment and creating jobs.

When combined, the measures in the 2009 budget and the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009, would provide more than $15 billion in tax relief to Ontario individuals, families—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I recognize we're in orders of the day, but I want to raise a point of order in regard to what the Minister of Finance is currently doing. You know that there was an act that was passed in this House called the Taxpayer Protection Act. I'm not going to go through it and make a long point of order, but here's the gist of it: Government is not able to increase taxes unless, in the previous election, it had filed with the Chief Electoral Officer its plan to raise taxes. The only way that a government could raise taxes, according to the Taxpayer Protection Act, is they would have had to file in the last election a notice to the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to do so. Clearly, that was not done.

I'm not going to read the entire act because you're going to think I'm being dilatory, but I want to get to my point here. First of all, there is an exemption for it to be able to do so. It says:

"2(1) A member of the executive council shall not include in a bill a provision that increases, or permits the increase of, a tax rate under a designated tax statute or that establishes a new tax unless,

"(a) a referendum concerning the increase or the new tax is held under this act before the bill is introduced; and

"(b) the referendum authorizes the increase or the new tax."

I'm not going to read it all; I'm going to come to my point. It basically says that if the referendum is not needed by way of exemption, then the following has to happen, which is public notice, and this is my point. It says on, I think, page 3 or 4 of the act:

"Public notice

"(2) If no referendum is required by virtue of subsection (1), the minister shall prepare a statement indicating that, in his or her opinion, a specified circumstance listed in subsection (1) exists and shall lay the statement before the assembly or give it to the Clerk of the Assembly before the applicable bill is introduced...." I would like to see such a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm prepared to respond to that point of order that has been raised. The member raises a point that is a matter of law, not procedure, and is therefore not one that can be addressed through a point of order. However, in the interests of facilitating the business of the House, I should indicate that the minister has filed with the Clerk the required affirmation that specified circumstances in subsection 5(1) of the Taxpayer Protection Act exist.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely right. This was filed on November 16. It is on page VII of the tax plan for jobs and growth, which is in the possession of all members. I will read it:

"Pursuant to subsection 5(2) of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, this statement will confirm that ... the specified circumstances in paragraph 1 of subsection 5(1) exist. The total tax relief package, including the proposed measures announced today, would reduce Ontario revenue by $3.4 billion over the first four years, net of federal assistance of $4.3 billion."

I would like to continue along and outline a few more highlights of Bill 218. Effective July 1, 2010, should the bill be passed, we would replace the current retail sales tax with a value-added sales tax and combine it with the federal GST to create the harmonized sales tax, or HST. The HST would make Ontario businesses more competitive, increase business investment, create new jobs, raise incomes and reduce prices for many consumer expenditures.

Replacing the RST with a value-added sales tax, or VAT, is long overdue. In fact, more than 140 countries and four other Canadian provinces have adopted a value-added tax. More recently, British Columbia has announced its proposal to adopt the HST. Even the federal government agrees this step is needed to make Ontario more attractive for investment. That is why we recently concluded a comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement.

This historic agreement would see the government of Canada provide Ontario with a total of $4.3 billion in transitional assistance, $3 billion on July 1, 2010, and an additional $1.3 billion on July 1, 2011, to help promote economic growth and support the transition to the HST.

This government is also proposing to help smooth the transition to the HST. Eligible Ontario residents 18 years of age or over who have a spouse or a common-law partner or live with their child would receive transition benefit payments in June 2010, December 2010 and June 2011. Eligible families, including single parents, with incomes of $160,000 or less would get three payments totalling $1,000. Eligible single individuals with net incomes of $80,000 or less would get three payments totalling $300. These payments would not be taxable. This measure would provide an estimated $4 billion in relief to 6.5 million eligible individuals and families.

Moving to the HST would cause some purchases to cost more because some goods and services that are not

subject to the RST would become subject to the provincial portion of the HST. However, Ontarians would not see a change in taxable status for 83% of total consumer expenditures. As announced in the 2009 budget, we are proposing to provide targeted tax relief on many items important to Ontario families by providing point-of-sale rebates of the 8% Ontario portion of the HST for books, children's clothing, children's footwear, children's car seats, children's car booster seats, diapers and feminine hygiene products.

In addition to these point-of-sale rebates, Ontario proposes to provide additional point-of-sale rebates for print newspapers, as well as qualifying prepared foods and beverages sold for a total of $4 and under. We believe that this would further help Ontario families in the transition to the HST.

Small businesses would also be provided with help as the Ontario government would provide up to $400 million in one-time transitional assistance.

To support public service bodies, for instance school authorities, hospital authorities, public colleges, universities, municipal charities and non-profit organizations, as well as Ontario farmers, these sectors would not be subject to the temporary restrictions on certain input tax credits during the phase-in of the HST.

We are also proposing to allow Ontarians to keep more of their money. As outlined in the 2009 budget, we are proposing $10.6 billion over three years in permanent tax relief for people by cutting personal income tax, or PIT, enhancing ongoing sales and property tax relief, and providing $4 billion in direct payments to ensure a smooth transition to the HST.

Effective January 1, 2010, the tax rate on the first tax bracket would be cut by one percentage point, from 6.05% to 5.05%, providing more than $1.1 billion in personal income tax relief in 2010-11.

1000

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is with great concern that I submit what the official opposition, under the leadership of Tim Hudak, believes to be a contempt of the Legislature for your consideration and that of members of this assembly. As you know, the official opposition takes it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. That is a point of privilege, and you have to give notice to the Speaker prior to introducing it.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are also proposing to allow Ontarians to keep more of their money. As outlined in the 2009 budget, we are proposing $10.6 billion over three years in tax relief for people by cutting personal income tax, or PIT, enhancing ongoing sales and property tax relief, and providing $4 billion in direct payments to ensure a smooth transition to the HST.

Effective January 1, 2010, the tax rate on the first tax bracket would be cut by one percentage point, from 6.05% to 5.05%, providing more than $1.1 billion in PIT relief in 2010-11.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The Minister of Finance has the floor. Please let him speak.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Effective January 1, 2010, the tax rate on the first tax bracket would be cut by one percentage point, from 6.05% to 5.05%, providing more than—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I would ask honourable members to come to order. Please allow the Minister of Finance to continue his remarks.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Ontario families and individuals with up to $80,000 in income would get an average personal income tax—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As the official opposition, we take our duty to hold the government to account very seriously. We've made it a priority to ensure that the activities and the proceedings in this chamber are part of a civilized debate on matters of public interest. We had hoped that the Premier and his government caucus would also contribute to our efforts to "treat the Legislature and its members and the people they represent at all times with respect." Our focus on this, as Speaker Fraser—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Please take your seat. I'd like you to get to the point of order. Is there something disorderly about the debate this morning?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: As Speaker Fraser in Canada's House of Commons observed on October 10, 1989, "We are not an executive democracy. We are not an administrative democracy. We are—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Please take your seat. Order. I give you one more chance to get to the bottom of the point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We in the opposition feel that there need to be public hearings into this. I quote the Canadian House of Commons, Eugene Forsey, who states, on page 18 of his October 1985 submission, that responsible government is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Sorry, but I don't see the point of order in terms of this morning's debate. I would ask the Minister of Finance to continue his remarks.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are also proposing to allow Ontarians to keep more of their money. As outlined in the 2009 budget, we are proposing $10.6 billion over three years in tax relief for people by cutting personal income tax, or PIT, enhancing ongoing sales and property tax relief, and providing $4 billion in direct payments to ensure a smooth transition to the HST.

Effective January 1, 2010, the tax rate on the first tax bracket would be—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My initial point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): You should wait until I recognize the honourable member. The honourable member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the point of order that I just raised, which you indicated was a point of privilege, I want to note that

on September 25, 2006, the point of order was raised by the member for Leeds–Grenville. Contempt was raised as a point of order for entertainment. And by the way, the Speaker gave due consideration to a similar point of order for the member of Leeds–Grenville. Would you like me to repeat it, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I would just comment that at that time, the point of order was seen as a point of privilege. The Speaker did hear it. It's not a legitimate point of order at this time. It pertained at that time to what was going on in the House at that moment.

The Minister of Finance does have the floor. He has the right to be heard, and he has the right to speak. I'd ask you to respect that.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Effective January 1, 2010, the tax rate on the first tax bracket would be cut by one percentage point, from 6.05% to 5.05%, providing more than $1.1 billion in personal income tax relief in 2010-11. As a result, 93% of taxpayers would see a personal income tax cut, and approximately 90,000 lower-income tax filers would no longer pay Ontario PIT.

Ontario families and individuals with up to $80,000 in income—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I'd ask the House to come to order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I'd ask the honourable members to come to order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. This House will take a five-minute recess.

The House recessed from 1006 to 1013.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: In 2003, Dalton McGuinty promised the people of Ontario that he wouldn't raise their taxes. He then brought in the single largest tax increase in Ontario's history, the so-called health tax. In 2007, the same Dalton McGuinty—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Honourable member, please take your seat. I would ask you to please take your seat. I would like you to get to the point of the point of order tersely, as it says in the standing orders.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'll do that right away.

In 2007, the same Premier Dalton McGuinty promised the people of Ontario he wouldn't raise taxes.

Interjection: Public hearings.

Mr. Robert Bailey: We're now calling for public hearings. We want this Premier to call public hearings. He's nothing but a cowardly liar if he won't do that, and I ask him—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I ask the honourable member for Sarnia–Lambton to withdraw that comment.

Is the honourable member refusing to withdraw that comment?

One moment.

Could I ask the honourable member for Sarnia–Lambton to withdraw that comment?

If the honourable member from Sarnia–Lambton does not wish to withdraw the offending comment, I have no choice but to name the member.

I name the member for Sarnia–Lambton and ask him to remove himself from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I would ask the honourable member to remove himself from the chamber.

Mr. Bailey was escorted from the chamber.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being past 10:15 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Prue: I am pleased to introduce Shanthini Mylvaganam, the mother of page Saeyon.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: On behalf of the southwest caucus chair, MPP Pat Hoy, I'd like to welcome the delegation from the South West Economic Alliance to Queen's Park: Dan Mathieson, the mayor of Stratford and the current chair of the South West Economic Alliance; mayor of London, Anne Marie DeCicco-Best; warden of Middlesex and mayor of Thames Centre, Jim Maudsley; mayor of Middlesex Centre, Al Edmondson; mayor of Goderich, Deb Shewfelt; warden for Huron County, Ken Oke; mayor of Tillsonburg, Stephen Molnar; warden of Oxford and mayor of Ingersoll, Paul Holbrough; mayor of Woodstock, Michael Harding; warden of Lambton, Jim Burns. Welcome, everybody, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I would like to introduce to the House today my friend's mom and dad, Paul and Anne Allison from Collingwood. Welcome.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I realize they've already been introduced, but I'd like to extend a personal welcome to Mayor Harding, from Woodstock; Mayor Holbrough, from Ingersoll; and Mayor Steve Molnar, from Tillsonburg.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to introduce and welcome to the Legislature Dr. Robin Hesler, Greg Gurniak, Greg Toffner, Michelle Falkiner, Dawn-anne Lebarron and Rory William-Demetrioff. They're all members of the Ontario Association of Medical Radiation Technologists. Last week, when we were on constituency week, was Medical Radiation Technologists Week. Welcome to you all.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to take this opportunity to welcome a number of guests to the Speaker's gallery who have been introduced.

As well, welcome to the former member of Chatham from the 35th Parliament, Randy Hope. Welcome back to Queen's Park, Randy.

We have with us today guests who are here for Children's Day in the Legislature. Welcome to Connie Boud-

reau; Chloe Caissie; Irwin Elman, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth; Ben Heaps, who is my partner, who unfortunately is sick today; Les Horne, of DCI-Canada; Keira Johnson; Noterlee Johnson; Matthew Massel, Agnes Samler; Yessina Vasquez; and Denisha Wright. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of the member from York West, I'd like to welcome Joseph Pulcini and his grade 10 civics class students from James Cardinal McGuigan Catholic High School. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome St. Joseph Catholic School from Uxbridge and their teacher, Jackie Loewen, grade 5.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'd like to introduce the students from Lincoln Heights Public School in Waterloo and their teacher, Mr. Don Gowing.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Acting Premier. This government is a disgrace. How can you justify not letting the people of this province be heard on Bill 218, the largest tax increase we've seen in this province? Why are you ramming through the HST? Why won't you let the people of North Bay and the member from the riding of Nipissing be heard? What have you got to fear?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will withdraw the comment.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I withdraw.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government is committed to creating 691,000 new jobs for Ontario. Since we announced the details of our plan way back last March, myself and the Minister of Revenue have travelled to more than 50 communities across Ontario and taken questions. We had the debate on the budget motion here in the House. We dealt at length with the HST and the other tax measures that are designed to create those 600,000 jobs. The people of Ontario will have had opportunities, will continue to have opportunities, and I fully expect a very, very complete debate on this important job-creating initiative as we move forward to a better—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My supplementary is to the minister as well about the spineless approach of this government with respect to public hearings on the largest sales tax increase in the history of this province. You are not allowing public consultations. The people of Cornwall, Iroquois, Morrisburg and throughout the riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry want to have input into this legislation. I would ask the minister: When will you encourage your member who represents that area to stand up and speak out on behalf of the people he supposedly represents?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I can tell you that Jim Brownell is the strongest and most effective member that that region of the province has ever had. Just last week I had the opportunity to meet with a number of leaders—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He's not here to defend himself. How could he—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You know we do not make references to attendance of members. Stop the clock.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: My colleague Mr. Brownell is having surgery shortly. As a result, last week he arranged a meeting with myself and a number of leaders from Cornwall, where we talked with the mayor, for instance, and a number of others about our tax plan, about our policies moving forward. We sought their input and we've heard them.

There are, have been and will continue to be many opportunities for public involvement in this very important debate, but do not discount this government's resolve to do everything it can to create 600,000 new jobs. The opposition must do its job, and I respect that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: The Minister of Finance has just made reference to the fact that one of his backbenchers arranged a meeting specifically with him and certain selected people from the honourable member's riding to discuss the HST. Why will the minister not extend the same benefit to the constituents of the member from Richmond Hill, the member from Oak Ridges–Markham and other people across the province and have an open consultation about the HST where they can ask the piercing questions that are not being answered in this House? Why will he not do that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As a matter of fact, I think it was about a week after the introduction of the budget that the members for Markham, Richmond Hill and others had a public meeting. There were more than 200 people, including the media and critics of the government. I took about 25 questions. I might say I was criticized by some of the questioners. The housing industry was represented there. It was well publicized. My colleague the Minister of Revenue has done similar meetings, and I understand you, sir, were at one of those meetings.

1040

We will continue to reach out. We will continue to build on this important job creation initiative. We will continue with the debate in the House, I hope. I understand the opposition's desire to try to stop this, but as the government, do not underestimate our resolve to move forward and create 600,000 new jobs for Ontario. Do not underestimate our resolve. This is too important for the future of Ontario and her people.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Minister of Finance: When will you stop playing this charade that five hours of hearings in Toronto is fair to Ontario seniors in Thun-

der Bay, in Sudbury, in Sarnia, in North Bay, London, Barrie and everywhere else across this province? Call public hearings.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Lanark will come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I don't need the assistance of the Minister of Municipal Affairs in overseeing the House.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Last week in Ottawa I met with a number of leaders of that community. In fact, contained in the budget that this member is going to vote against is an initiative that will help the film and creative arts industry in Ottawa compete and bring jobs to Ottawa. I will refer her to the individual and the corporation involved.

I assure the member that I've been to Ottawa, I think, on five occasions at the invitation of my colleagues. We have had public meetings. We have had questions and answers, and I have met with a variety of critics of the government. We will continue to do that and I will be delighted to continue that. We will have public hearings on this bill, but do not underestimate our resolve to create 600,000 jobs, to cut—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: In 2003, Premier Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes—he even signed the Taxpayer Protection Act—and then he brought in the largest tax increase in Ontario's history. In 2007, he promised again not to raise taxes, and now he's bringing in the largest increase in sales tax in Ontario's history. Furthermore, he's bringing in this act without public hearings. This Premier lied to the people of Ontario and he—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member from Halton to withdraw the comment that he made.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Not without public hearings, Mr. Speaker. Not without public hearings on this bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I give the honourable member from Halton a second opportunity to withdraw his comment.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Not without the finance minister tabling—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I have no choice but to name Ted Chudleigh, the member from Halton, and ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort him from the chamber.

Mr. Chudleigh was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I believe, in response to the question, that in fact we are cutting taxes and we have complied with the provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act. That's been tabled with the Clerk of the Legislature.

This tax package is important, and I want those personal tax cuts to take effect on January 1, 2010. This package has been in the public purview for five and a half months. There have been umpteen opportunities in here, and we will continue to have more opportunities to debate this and answer questions from our colleagues in the opposition. We will have considerably more public hearings on this budget bill than a number of Conservative budget bills—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary. The member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also for the Minister of Finance. Minister, how many more people have to get thrown out of this House so that you'll come to your senses and listen to the people of Ontario? You should be ashamed. After all your years as a parliamentarian and as an assistant before that, you should have respect for the people of Ontario and respect for the people of Willowdale, where I held meetings recently. They want answers to many questions regarding the implementation of the HST—they and many, many other ridings across this province.

Why will you not allow the people of Ontario to be heard on this very important tax measure, the most important change in your lifetime and in my lifetime that has ever taken place in the history of this province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm reminded, for instance, that in Mississauga and Brampton, with a population of 1.2 million, every one of the seven MPPs representing those two cities attended a budget briefing attended by the media and more than 300 people, where questions were taken and answered. We will, in fact, have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will, in fact, continue those. We will have budget hearings.

With respect to decisions by the Speaker, I say to the member opposite, who removed the first member, that he made the absolute right decision in the circumstances.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Over the past few weeks, the McGuinty government has rejected some very, very modest proposals. This government refuses to allow the committee reviewing the HST legislation to travel across the province to listen to Ontario families, and it's hiding the actual cost of the new tax on gas and hydro. My question is a simple one: Why is this government so afraid of an honest debate on the HST?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let's see. I'll work in reverse. On November 12, we were in Etobicoke; in Hamilton, the member will be interested to know, on November 12 as well—the Minister of Revenue; London, November 9; Thunder Bay on November 5; Sudbury on November 4; at Niagara College on November 4—

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We listen to all Ontarians. We don't check memberships—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member from Hamilton East to come to order, please.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will continue to hear from Ontarians across the province, as we've heard from a variety of sources, including the Daily Bread Food Bank, including a number of other anti-poverty groups, who have said that this budget is the right budget. I intend to move forward and implement the Ontario child benefit. I intend to implement the tax cuts for low-income Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: None of those meetings that this minister talks about were open to the public. They were a couple of tête-à-têtes with chambers of commerce, so he is not listening to the people of this province.

The McGuinty Liberals were not elected on a harmonized sales tax platform; in fact, quite the opposite. During the 2007 campaign, the Premier rejected the HST, and when asked about it, he said, "Our government is currently pursuing other ways to foster new investments."

The Premier told Ontarians one thing when he wanted their votes and now he's doing the exact opposite and hiding from those very voters. Why is he doing that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The world has witnessed one of the largest financial meltdowns since the Great Depression. Since that election, we've examined options that are available to us. We have consulted widely. We have attended meetings. We had a full debate on our budget bill here in this House, seven months ago.

It is not good enough to stay with the status quo. It is incumbent on us to put forward a plan that will create jobs, and this plan will do that. It is incumbent upon us to take into account the views of Ontarians, and we are doing that. I'll remind the member that we have made a number of very substantive changes since the introduction of the budget, resultant from the input we've had from the public and sectors within the public.

This is the right plan. We will have the same amount of budget hearings as we've had on fall budget bills in the past, and we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll take this final supplementary to remind this Acting Premier of a couple of things—the fact that this government has changed its tune on several things since being elected. The Premier used to actually criticize corporate tax cuts. He rejected the HST when it was electorally convenient. Given his chronic flip-flopping, the least the Premier could do is provide Ontarians with a chance to be heard at province-wide legislative hearings. Why won't the government allow this?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite is quite right: We rejected it as a stand-alone measure. However, with the help of our federal government and the money and the exemptions they're allowing—allowing us to cut personal taxes, allowing us to help those of modest incomes, allowing us to move forward on the Ontario child benefit two years ahead of schedule, allowing us to cut the lowest tax bracket for Ontario's most vulnerable people. This package of tax cuts is the right package, it has been subject to enormous scrutiny, and it will continue to be subject to appropriate scrutiny. But make no mistake; do not underestimate our resolve to implement those important tax cuts effective January 1, 2010, and do not underestimate our resolve to continue to engage Ontarians in an ongoing dialogue about how we create jobs, make this economy better for all Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question. The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the finance minister. Your private meetings with Liberal friends are not public meetings. Why won't you let the people of Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, no. My apologies. I erred. The next question is for the third party.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that. What I was going to say is that in fact the warm and cozy relationship that this Acting Premier describes between the federal Tories and the provincial Liberals leaves the rest of the province out in the cold. The McGuinty government can easily rhyme off the cost of HST exemptions—and this question is back to that Acting Premier—but when it comes to revealing the actual costs of the heating tax, home heating costs, this government is nowhere to be found. They play hide and seek when it comes to revealing the real numbers. Ontarians can seek out the numbers, but the McGuinty government does everything they can possibly do to hide the numbers.

We've been told the HST on Timbits and newspapers would raise $325 million. My question is simple: How much will the HST on home heating take from the pockets of Ontario families?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I will refer the member to the documents I referred her to yesterday. On page 134 of the budget, which was tabled in this House last March, the tax reform measures of converting the RST base to the new sales tax base are outlined very clearly, in table eight, top of page. Now, the member has asked for a breakdown by item and those are made available in every fall statement up until last year—I refer her to that—where we very clearly outline the tax, what are called tax expenditures; those are revenues that are forgone by a government not collecting those revenues.

What I will say to the leader of the third party again is that this package of tax cuts will help the poorest in this province, it will help build this economy and create 600,000 jobs. It's the right policy. It's about change for a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister knows that they think that these numbers are a state secret. They've refused an FOI from us for exactly that reason, so I don't know what this minister is trying to prove here.

But you know what? I can tell you that seniors are really concerned about this tax. Since the McGuinty government won't go out and listen to them across the province, I'm going to give you some of the comments that they're saying.

David Thornton writes this: "[The HST] will increase taxes on everyday services we use, including hydro, natural gas, heating fuels ... [and] gasoline. Does Premier McGuinty and his cabinet not realize the strain this will put on to seniors?"

Marie Howie in eastern Ontario writes: "[The HST] will hurt people already paying more than their full share of taxes ... how can this tax on heating help seniors?"

Why is this arrogant government refusing to tell seniors like David and Marie how much extra they'll end up paying on home heating costs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, we too have heard from a number of groups about the importance of the tax cuts that are included. For instance, we are doubling the seniors' property tax credit, and that member and her party are going to vote against it.

We are reducing the tax rate on the first income tax bracket, which captures most Ontarian seniors. Overall, 93% of Ontarians will see tax reductions. But more importantly, we are putting forward a package that will create some 600,000 jobs in this province.

I say to the member opposite, we hear from people too, all the time, in support of this package. We hear of the need to create jobs. We hear of the need for a fairer, better and cleaner tax system. That's what we're doing. This will give Ontario a better future with more jobs, higher incomes and more capital investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I've actually heard from seniors across Ontario. Gary Wallace writes this: "As a retired pensioner, I find it ... hard, as it is, to pay for ... hydro and heating oil now."

Bill Stratton in Oshawa says: "I am retired and ... on a fixed income. I cannot afford to pay additional taxes on things that I normally don't pay taxes on now."

Jane deHaan from Sudbury adds, "For retired persons such as myself, there will be a very significant increase in my cost of living."

Why won't this government come clean and reveal how much the tax on home heating will cost seniors like Bill and like Jane?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Without knowing the individuals, I would suggest that they will, in fact, see an overall reduction in the amount of taxes they pay. The leader of the third party can try to frame an issue and can deal with one part of the package and not the other, but this government will not.

We have brought forward a package that will benefit senior citizens, that will lower taxes for most of them, that will lower their property taxes, that will lower their income taxes and that will create jobs for their children and their grandchildren. That is what we are called upon in these difficult times to do. Leaders cannot shirk that responsibility.

We will continue to work in the interest of all Ontarians with a package of tax reform, tax cuts and an overall tax reduction that will create some 600,000 net new jobs, improve incomes, improve capital investment and make this province a better place for the children and grandchildren—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The Liberals and this ministry are a disgrace. Their private meetings with their Liberal friends are not public hearings. This minister has undertaken the largest single tax grab in this province's history. He's a disgrace. He hasn't brought it to the people of Thunder Bay or Sault Ste. Marie or North Bay. He's hiding behind those private Liberal meetings. This Liberal government is gutless and acting cowardly. Bring public meetings throughout this province—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw his comment, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member is right. It is important to meet with people, and I talked to a number of my members just in the gist of question period. A number of seniors' clubs, the Mississauga Chinese Business Association, the association of Pakistani professionals—these are examples of the types of people we have been seeing. We will indeed have further public hearings, as we have, and have the same amount of hearings we've had on previous fall budget bills.

I will remind the member opposite: This government is resolved to create jobs. This government is resolved to create a tax system that is fairer and cleaner. This government is resolved to improve investment opportunities, create jobs, and lower taxes for people of modest incomes, and that's why we brought forward this package that, in fact, cuts taxes some $3.4 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary? The member from Thornhill.

1100

Mr. Peter Shurman: Private meetings with your friends in whatever riding are not public hearings. I have had a public meeting in my riding under my tutelage, and I looked for someone to speak in favour of the HST and could not find a soul.

At least my constituents had a chance to meet in public. Not so the ones you've muzzled in Eglinton–

Lawrence and in York Centre, as you've muzzled the members who represent those ridings. You answer questions about the HST the way you've treated me for the last two months on the Windsor Energy Centre. You, sir, are a contemptible liar and you don't deserve to be in here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member from Thornhill to withdraw his comment, please.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Not until that member calls public hearings—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw his comment.

Mr. Peter Shurman: No, Speaker, I will not withdraw that comment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I have no choice but to name Peter Shurman, the member from Thornhill, and ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort him from the chamber, please.

Mr. Shurman was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Yesterday in this House I raised the case of Payukotayno. I raised the case of the 80-some attempted suicides that we've had on James Bay over the last year. I raised with you what it's going to mean if Payukotayno ends up having to shut its doors in mid-December. There will be no one there to answer the phone when a family, a child or a police officer calls in order to try to deal with a child at risk.

My question to you is this, and I ask you again: Are you prepared to respond to the funding requests that have been put forward by Payukotayno and other child and family services across the north that face similar situations?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me tell you, as I had an opportunity to say yesterday, that the ministry staff are currently working on-site in Moosonee with the agency to identify short- and long-term strategies that will not compromise child safety.

I can tell you that we have been working very closely with all of our agencies across the north. In fact this agency, Payukotayno, is a multi-service agency that delivers both child protection and youth and mental health services. We continue to work with them closely to make sure we can have better outcomes for kids across the province.

Aboriginal youth face a number of challenges. We work very closely; I've been working with the Chiefs of Ontario. We've been working in partnership with a variety of ministries to tackle an issue that has not been tackled for many, many years. We're committed to better outcomes for kids. That means we need to do—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, you speak about better outcomes for kids. What kids want is to be able to be safe when they wake up in the morning and again when they go to bed at night. The reality is that we've had over 80 attempted suicides, and you know as well as I do that Payukotayno is underfunded by at least $4 million. I'm told by Toby Beck, the director, and others I've met with that they're not able to respond to their current mandate as a result of your underfunding. On top of that, you're going to reduce their funding by another $1 million.

I say to you, we cannot afford to go through another study; we can't afford to go through another process. We need to know from you now, will the kids of James Bay and other children across northern Ontario have the telephone answered when they're in crisis, or are we going to expect to see what we see coming now in mid-December with Payukotayno?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me assure this House that children across the north who face a wide range of challenging issues will be responded to. We are committed to the kids of Ontario, and that is precisely why we are working so hard each and every day, whether it's in our regional offices, whether it is myself with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, whether it is reaching out to the Chiefs of Ontario and to the leadership in this province who are looking for solutions. I invite you—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East will please come to order.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, she's not answering the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Don't challenge the Speaker, please. As the members know, if they're dissatisfied with an answer that any ministry gives they have the ability to file the appropriate paperwork and ask for a late show.

Minister?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I know the member opposite cares about the kids in his community. I care about those kids too. Our government cares about those kids. That's why we've invested significant dollars year over year and doubled the funding to aboriginal children's aid societies.

Is there more to do? Absolutely, yes. Are we at the table doing that work 100%? I invite my friends opposite to join us as we forge a new pathway to deliver better services and have better outcomes for these kids so that we don't continue to have the history that we've had in this province. We need to move forward, and we're committed to doing that.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Eric Hoskins: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. With the announcement yesterday that all Ontarians over six months of age are now eligible for the H1N1 vaccine, there will no doubt be lineups at public clinics. Families who have waited to get their shots are anxious to protect their families.

Throughout the rollout of the vaccine, we've heard about the challenges in getting more vaccine out to family doctors in our communities. I should say that Toronto Public Health did an excellent job in getting H1N1 vaccine out to the clinic where I used to work. It enabled me to vaccinate, on a volunteer basis, more than 100 high-priority residents of St. Paul's last week, including many young children as well as clients of Wychwood Open Door, a drop-in centre serving homeless and socially isolated people in St. Paul's.

Getting your vaccine from your family doctor is a great option and may save some time for families. Could the minister please update this House on the number of doctors now offering the vaccine?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to start by saying that we have now successfully completed the sequenced phase-in of the H1N1 vaccination program. Never before have we vaccinated so many people in so short a time: 2.5 million people have received their H1N1 vaccination in the past three weeks.

Applause.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you.

Starting today, as the member said, all Ontarians aged six months and over are eligible to receive the vaccine, and we are relying on Ontario's doctors to help us get that work done. They've been doing an excellent job, and I want to thank them for their hard work.

There are now more than 4,200 health care providers across the province providing the vaccine, one of them an MPP: Thank you, Dr. Hoskins. Ontarians who want to get the H1N1 flu shot should call their doctor first or go online at ontario.ca/flu to find information about a clinic in their community. Our public health—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Eric Hoskins: At the beginning of the rollout of the H1N1 vaccine, some public clinics had long lines of people waiting hours to receive their shots. More recently, we've seen these lines dwindle in many places, with some public clinics just seeing a trickle of residents coming in for their shots. It is essential that we push ahead to ensure that as many Ontarians as possible get their H1N1 flu shot. We need to ensure that our most vulnerable are protected and that workplaces remain productive. Now that the government has expanded eligibility for the vaccine, the challenge is to get the word out to Ontarians to roll up their sleeves and get their shot. Could the minister outline how she plans to get the message to Ontarians that it's important to get your H1N1 flu shot?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: My honourable colleague raises a very good point. It's essential that we continue to remind Ontarians of how important it is to get that shot. Recent opinion polls show that somewhere between 45% and 50% of Ontarians are planning to get the vaccine. We need to do better than that. Getting the shot is the single most important thing someone can do to protect not only themselves but the people around them, so we're going to continue to encourage Ontarians to get the vaccine.

Later this week we're launching ads in more than 160 newspapers. We're going to reach out to colleges and university campuses and we're going to run radio ads in more than 20 languages to ensure that we inform all Ontarians about the vaccine. We're going to keep working hard to make sure we get as many Ontarians vaccinated as we possibly can.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Revenue. On two separate occasions, you've stood in this Legislature and stated that registration fees were exempt for hockey players. However, regular ice fees are 10 times the cost of registration fees. From Thunder Bay to Sault Ste. Marie, hockey is going to be substantially impacted by the increase of the HST. Will you commit to allowing province-wide hearings so that those hockey leagues in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and throughout the entire province have an opportunity to express the impact?

1110

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. I'd like to repeat what I've already said in the House, and it's important for us under the tax reform to understand this. If a parent is registering their child for minor sports today and there is no GST, there will be no HST. If a municipality provides—

Interjections.

Hon. John Wilkinson: As I was saying before I was interrupted, it is important for people to understand the nature of our tax reform. If a municipality is providing ice time, for example, for children who are 14 or under or people who are disabled, today there is no GST charged and, as a result, there will be no HST charged. But it is important to remember that when a particular municipality provides that service, if it is an area where they have to charge the HST, that municipality now for the first time will receive the input tax credits or the tax rebates provided to municipalities. So it's important for them to re-price their services—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary? The member from Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the minister: It's a good thing you're talking about municipalities. You know, private meetings are not public consultations. Your HST scheme will bring great hardships to municipalities. Why are you only rebating them 78% when the federal government rebates them 100%? You have not given the people of this province or the leaders of their municipalities the opportunity for public consultations. Will the minister table any minutes or Hansard of any of your so-called public meetings?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to our municipalities that have—

Interjections.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Since 1961, we have had this PST system. You know that when a municipality buys a fire truck there's no PST, but when they buy a police car,

there is. So when we do our tax reform, we will have achieved a 78% rebate to make municipalities whole. Do you know what it is in other provinces that have the HST for municipalities? It's zero or 50%. But here in the province of Ontario—and I say to our mayors who are visiting today—we have achieved a 78% rebate, to put them exactly back to the position they were in.

I've talked to municipalities right across this great province and they are telling me that they are particularly pleased that when we made this tax reform, we took their concerns into consideration and made sure that municipalities, universities, social services, hospitals and school boards are all receiving rebates to make sure they're in the same position they were in before—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, Liberal MPPs blocked motions at the public accounts committee that would have called Premier's office staff as witnesses into eHealth. Liberal MPPs had marching orders and they followed them. Without saying a word, without any debate, without defending their actions, they voted against bringing witnesses from the Premier's office and former eHealth executives to be called to answer questions as to what went wrong at eHealth. Silence was their response because their actions could not be defended.

My question is simple: Why is the McGuinty government shutting down the only avenue that Ontarians have to get to the bottom of what went wrong at eHealth, learn from it, make sure we never do it again and turn the page?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I appreciate the question the member asked. I will refer her to the Auditor General's report. This has had a thorough—

Hon. Gerry Phillips: It's very comprehensive.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's a very comprehensive report, a very thorough review of that situation. There's no doubt that better oversight was needed. We have taken a number of steps to ensure that there's better oversight. We're also committed to the principles of eHealth, to the principles of putting online our health records, to move the file forward. A good portion of the money that has been spent has in fact yielded some important steps forward for us as we move to greater digitalization of our health records. This government remains committed to managing and moving forward on this very important initiative for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: What the minister seems to say is that when the auditor does his review it's always good and it should stop there, but this is not how this House works. The reports come to public accounts, we get to hear witnesses, we get to clarify questions and make recommendations to this House. By blocking witnesses from coming, he is blocking this committee from doing their work.

There are e-mails between Sarah Kramer and Dr. Hudson that mentioned the Premier being totally onside. There is mention of Sacha Bhatia from the Premier's office that says that she loved the infamous $25,000 speech from Sarah Kramer. Through freedom of information we know that Jamison Steeve from the Premier's office met with some eHealth consultants, met some lobbyists. But why were the Liberal MPPs at public accounts told to shut up and shut down calling the Premier's staff, Sarah Kramer and Dr. Hudson to answer questions as to what went wrong at eHealth?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm actually happy for the question because it gives me an opportunity to highlight just how important it is that we proceed with eHealth. It's actually working in our fight against H1N1. Doctors who do have electronic medical records are able to quickly identify the people who are in our high-priority groups and get them into the office for a shot immediately. Here's what Dr. Marcus Law, a family health team doctor in Toronto, told CTV last night: "Think about going back to 10,000 paper charts and just flip through every chart and find out which patient has the shot, which patient has diabetes and should receive the H1N1 shot. I can actually track now how many of my seniors, how many of my patients over 65 years old have not received the seasonal flu shot yet." This is just one example of how our investments in electronic health—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Residents in my riding of Huron–Bruce have been receiving e-mails that I feel, in my view, are deliberately misleading about the HST. One e-mail in particular attempts to play on the concerns of seniors. This e-mail claims to have researched how the HST will affect seniors. The result is full of misinformation. The e-mail claims that home telephone fees will increase, and it makes the same claim about cable television and admission to sporting events. These claims are just not factual. The rate of taxation on these items will remain exactly the same.

I'll bet you are as astonished as I am that people would want to mislead our seniors. Would the minister tell us if seniors—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Certainly. I would withdraw that comment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, you need to say, "I withdraw."

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I withdraw, yes.

Would the minister tell us—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. I'd say to seniors that if they go to ontario.ca/taxchange they'll hear the whole story, not the half-story that is out there in some of these viral e-mails that are out there trying to get our seniors upset. That's not true. It seems that the—

Interjections.

Hon. John Wilkinson: The website shall set you free. That's why I say to seniors, what they'll find is that some 93% of Ontarians will receive a personal income tax cut on January 1, as long as we get the bill in front of this House passed. That's why we have to get it done before January. There are people who don't want to see the personal tax cuts. As well, it's important for us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Many seniors in my riding across Ontario are living on fixed incomes and there have been a number of chain e-mails, letters to the editor and articles looking at preferred meals under $4 as very important to seniors. Newspapers are also an important way seniors connect with their community and follow local and national events. Recently our government announced tax exemptions for newspapers and meals under $4.

1120

But I must say that I'm tired of hearing the Leader of Opposition calling this a greedy tax grab on seniors. This is the leader of the same party that voted against seniors yesterday when they voted against a private member's bill that would assist seniors.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

The member from Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Minister, are items that seniors depend on going to cost more without getting more?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Seniors in this province have a very long memory. Those seniors on fixed incomes, those who are struggling day by day, remember when a previous government cut welfare rates 22% overnight. They will never forget what happened to seniors who were at the margins when they were treated—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Lanark will please come to order.

Minister.

Hon. John Wilkinson: What seniors are happy about, when I have a chance to talk to them, and especially when they get to go to a website that tells the whole story, is that we are more than doubling what they receive today in regard to the GST rebate. That's tax-free money. We're more than doubling the property sales tax—the property credit for seniors. It's a way that we can honour our seniors. The vast majority of seniors have income. That means that they'll qualify for the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Stop the clock for a moment. This is question period and it's the opportunity to ask questions of ministers. There are some off conversations taking place between members and ministers, and I would just encourage that we have two lobbies available on either side. Those discussions would be much better taking place out there.

TAXATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Despite the fact that about 76% of the people in the province of Ontario are totally opposed to the HST, you have refused to hold public hearings throughout the province of Ontario. Your actions appear arrogant and they appear contemptuous of the people in this province who thought they lived in a democracy.

I ask you today, will you listen to those people? Will you travel throughout the province and hold public hearings?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I do think it's important to have a civil debate about this issue, and I applaud those who have concerns about the HST. That's why my colleagues and I have, since the introduction of the budget bill—I'd remind the member opposite that prior to the introduction of the budget, I had 15 public hearings across Ontario. Subsequent to the budget, I have engaged in a number of open meetings, as have my colleagues. We've had—I guess you could call this a debate, but we're attempting to have a debate on this issue in the House. We will have the same amount of public hearings on this fall bill as we've had in the past.

But I say to the member opposite, do not underestimate this government's will, working with our federal partners, to create more than 600,000 jobs and to lower taxes effective January 1, 2010—a few short weeks from now. We believe these are the important steps to take to help get this economy moving again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: To the finance minister as well: The businesses in the Barrie and Simcoe county area are leaders in the tourism industry here in Ontario, as are business leaders in the Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock area. They are all adamantly opposed to your HST tax grab and the negative impact it will have on the tourism industry.

Why will you not allow public hearings in tourism communities like Barrie, Lindsay, North Bay and the Muskokas so that you can hear how your tax grab will destroy thousands of tourism jobs in these tourism communities and not create the bogus and fantasy world job projections that you are trying to spin on the citizens of this province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We continue to engage in ongoing dialogue with the tourism industry from across Ontario. We have responded to their concerns I think in a very fulsome fashion, along with a number of other industry groups, citizens' organizations and so on. I believe, and I think my colleagues share this view, that the importance of creating 600,000 jobs is important. We believe this is the right course. We will have the same

amount of public hearings on this fall budget bill as we've had on past ones.

I'd remind my friend and colleague opposite that when their party was in government, they time-allocated more than 60% of their bills—budget bills with no public hearings, third reading time-allocated, and we are operating under the rules that that party established.

That being said, we will continue to meet—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Finance. The HST will make life less affordable for all Ontarians, but it will have a disproportionate impact on First Nations. Without consulting, the McGuinty Liberals have surrendered decision-making powers to the federal government, a move that could end the point-of-sale exemption for off-reserve purchases.

Grand Council Chief Mahdahbee says this: "Ontario and Canada have publicly pledged their commitment to helping eradicate First Nations poverty, but this cash grab will contribute to it."

How is a new tax that could cost Ontario's already struggling First Nations families thousands of dollars a step in the right direction?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member raises a very valid concern about the way the PST was collected versus the way the GST is collected. I can report to the member that myself and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs have met with Chief Toulouse and his colleagues. I have written to my federal counterpart, the Minister of Finance of Canada, asking the government of Canada to collect the harmonized sales tax the way we have collected the PST.

I think the member is right, that that is the appropriate way to do it. Mr. Flaherty and I have had the opportunity to discuss the issue on two occasions. We will continue to work with the federal government, and our hope is that the federal government will agree to allow that method of collection to go on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario First Nations are united in their opposition to the HST. I spoke to Chief Toulouse as well. Ontario Regional Chief Toulouse says this: "Both the provincial and federal governments failed to consult." Grand Council Chief Kelly says this: "You cannot pay lip service to improving relationships ... one day and the next day completely disregard our rights and the interests of our people."

What does a backroom deal with the Harper Conservatives without any consultation with the First Nations of Ontario say about this government's commitment, or lack thereof, to a new relationship with Ontario's aboriginal people?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to respond to that question. As the Minister of Finance said, we are working shoulder to shoulder with First Nation leaders and communities across this province when it comes to standing up for them and the need for them to have that point-of-sale exemption.

The finance minister has written to the Minister of Finance. He has spoken to the Minister of Finance federally, as I have to my colleague the federal minister of aboriginal affairs. Our revenue minister has also been in touch with his colleague.

We're doing everything we can to stand by our First Nations on this particular issue. The decision ultimately lies in the hands of the federal government on how to collect this tax. Aboriginal leaders know that. We're going to continue to push for them, and we're going to continue to work with them. We're proud of our new relationship that we're building with our First Nation communities.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Peel is one of the most diverse regions in Ontario, and it continues to be an attractive destination for newcomers. Over the last six years, 145,000 newcomers have settled in Peel region. Peel offers great strength through its diversity. Our newcomers have the potential to help us deliver a stronger, more vibrant Ontario. They have the ability to help us gain access to new markets, new talent and excellent leadership.

For Ontario to benefit from such talent, we need to invest in individuals from those diverse communities who are eager to take the next step in life and move into important leadership positions in our communities and our job force. These opportunities need to come from the business communities, from public organizations, the non-profit sector and all levels of government. Will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration tell us how he will make more leadership positions more available in Ontario?

1130

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the member from Brampton–Springdale. In Ontario we know that diversity is our greatest strength. This is why we support programs such as the DiverseCity project. This is a project aimed at bringing such potential to the front line in business, in the non-profit sector and in government. Together with the work of the Maytree Foundation and the Toronto City Summit Alliance, we are making significant progress.

According to the latest report, more than 300 individuals have made it on to public, private and non-profit boards. One hundred and forty more individuals have become spokespersons, helping to ensure a broad range of media voices.

We cannot afford to leave the best and the brightest on the sidelines, and we are not.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: In Peel region, and specifically in Brampton, we have many talented individuals with a wealth of experience who are ready to take the next step to move into those leadership positions in the community. Many of the newcomers have had exposure to resources and support services such as settlement services, language training and our bridge training programs. They have benefited from the programs and such support is clearly a component to their ultimate success in their career path. This only reiterates the necessity and importance of such services.

Peel is the second-largest region in Ontario, with an extremely culturally diverse makeup where newcomers represent 49% of the population. That's why it's vital to invest in Peel and that's why it's vital to invest in Brampton. There's a clear need for investments and there are clear benefits to investing. Will the minister commit to making much-needed investments in Brampton to ensure that newcomers have the right access to settlement services, language training and bridge training?

Hon. Michael Chan: In order to help newcomers succeed, we must invest in prioritized areas. These prioritized areas are settlement services, language training and bridge training.

Since 2003 we have invested over $700,000 in newcomer settlement services in Brampton. We have also invested more than $33 million in language training to support school boards in Peel. We also committed to bridge training programs. This is why in our recent budget we allocated an additional $50 million over two years for such training.

For a prosperous and vibrant Ontario, we know these investments matter.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is for the Minister of Finance. You continually promise this big promise of some 600,000 jobs, but let's have a reality check. Today in Ontario there are over 300,000 people—families, indeed, Minister—out of work and you have no plan for the economy—a huge deficit. Minister, it's clear that no one in Ontario actually believes you after your broken promises—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Culture will come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And Municipal Affairs.

Please continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, it's clear that no one in Ontario believes you and your message anymore. Whatever your message track is, this is an 8% tax on everything that people buy and use every day. Would you at least throw a lifeline to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, the member from Northumberland or the member from Peterborough? Have consultations across the province; if not across the province, in those ridings. Tell the people of Ontario the truth, Minister: that this is an 8% increase in the cost of living. What do you have to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The sad reality is that across many economies around the world many jobs have been lost, including Ontario's. That is precisely why we are compelled to bring in a plan to create jobs. I was delighted when Mr. Mintz's report was released. It had been peer-reviewed by a range of other economists, including Jim Stanford of the CAW—no neo-conservative at all, I might add. Hugh Mackenzie has also spoken about the importance of this type of tax system; and the Daily Bread Food Bank.

Unlike the member opposite, we will engage in a complete and transparent debate. I want to respect the rules of this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, and you yourself. We will continue to engage in the debate. My colleagues in those ridings have indeed had public meetings. I've had the opportunity to attend them and, indeed, one of your members who was thrown out for alleging there was no public—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: To the same minister: The undemocratic and authoritarian decision of this government to expedite the passage of Bill 218, their sales tax legislation, without giving the people of Ontario a chance to have their say through extensive public hearings is an assault on our system of parliamentary democracy and an affront to the people of Ontario.

The Premier twice signed the taxpayer protection pledge, promising not to raise taxes, and he has betrayed that promise. The people of Wellington–Halton Hills need to have their say, as do the people who live in Brampton West, before the final vote on Bill 218. Will the minister do the right thing and authorize the finance committee to travel across the province with extensive public hearings and listen to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I have a great deal of respect for my colleague opposite, and I know he has a great deal of respect for this institution. I only wish he had been so strong when his party set the rules as they exist today. I only wish you had spoken up at the time. I only wish you had talked about the time when your government was time-allocating budget bills, refusing third reading debate, time-allocating second reading debate, changing the rules of the Legislature and not having public consultations around the province.

My friend opposite is a good member of provincial Parliament and I believe very genuine in his concern. We will have those public hearings; we'll continue to do hearings and public consultations, as we have been doing, but I don't want to leave any misconception: We want to proceed with the tax cuts on January 1 and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to welcome a group of folks from the Ingersoll Fusion centre. In the gallery today we have James Timlin, the CAO for the town of Ingersoll; Bonnie Ward, director of parks and recreation for the town of Ingersoll; and Jason Smith, manager of the Fusion centre. We also have a number of youth that have been members of the Fusion Youth Centre since it was opened in February 2006. I want to commend them on their contributions to the centre and welcome them here to Queen's Park, and I ask the Legislative Assembly to do the same.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is my pleasure to introduce my aunt and uncle, Vic and Mary Campbell, who are here to listen to the debate on site 41. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Ontario Legislature.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's my privilege to introduce two of my guests who will be here momentarily, I hope. They are Tammy Rankin, who is the manager of the Durham Elder Abuse Network, who will be here to listen and I hope support my private member's bill this afternoon, Bill 188; as well as Detective Sergeant Philip Lillie, who is from the Durham Regional Police enforcement unit. I thank them both for attending here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PORK INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to welcome Ontario Pork to Queen's Park. I'm looking forward to meeting with them this afternoon to discuss the state of the industry and what we can do to help Ontario's pork farmers. I want to thank them for coming here to update all the members on the challenges they are facing.

In 2008, Ontario's pork industry contributed $4.7 billion and 33,000 jobs, from farm to fork, to the provincial economy. They are a major part of our agriculture industry and we know that what affects them has an impact on many other parts of our agricultural and rural economies, including feed suppliers, equipment manufacturers and many rural businesses.

As we all know, the last couple of years have been very difficult for hog farmers. They have had high input costs, low market prices, and then this year they were hit with the H1N1.

Over 98% of Canada's farms are family-owned and operated, and Ontario's swine industry certainly reflects that. It means that when these farmers are in trouble, they risk not only losing their farm and their livelihood, but in many cases their home.

I want to encourage all members of this Legislature to take the time later today to meet with Ontario Pork in rooms 228 and 230, and find out about the challenges that our farmers are facing.

I also want to take this opportunity to encourage all Ontarians, in this Legislature and at home, to support our hard-working hog farmers and put pork on your fork.

HOSPITAL FUNDRAISER

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased today to speak about a charity fundraiser that recently occurred in my community. On September 26 in Brampton, a sellout event featuring one of the world's top 10 stand-up comics, Russell Peters, took place.

Russell Peters, one of Brampton's own, was quoted as saying "No matter where I go in the world, Brampton is always home. It's where I grew up, where I went to school and where my mom still lives today."

Peters said, Brampton has changed a lot since his family first moved there in 1975 "and I'm pleased that we finally have the world-class hospital facility that we deserve."

When someone like Russell Peters, with an international reputation, takes the time to do a benefit concert in support of a Brampton hospital, it sends a signal to everyone who works in health care in my community. His actions and his works not only support high-quality health care but also boost the morale of workers who deliver our health care.

Russell Peters's performance exceeded our expectations. The sold-out performance raised more than $425,000, as well as raising the profile of my community.

It's not true that you can never go home. Russell Peters, who is busy filling venues in Mumbai, Sydney and New York City, did come home and made a huge, positive contribution to his community. For that, the people of Brampton are truly proud of Russell Peters, his generosity and his Brampton roots.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to share the concerns of my constituents in Parry Sound–Muskoka regarding this government's proposed harmonized sales tax. Here is a small sampling of the hundreds of e-mails I have received:

"Norm,

"I am writing to you to advise that the harmonizing of the DST/PST will be a disaster to the elderly on fixed incomes. The extra 8% increase in heating and hydro expenses will force me and others out of our homes. I personally am at the wall now as to household expenses."

That was from Robert in Port Sydney.

Dick Smyth writes:

"It costs me $3,500 to heat our house in Muskoka. With this shabby, shady, secret deal, you have automatically boosted my annual cost $280.

"I usually buy $30 of gasoline at a time every few days. Again, in the unlikely event gasoline prices remain stable, that's an extra $2.40 every time I go to the pumps.

"If this is not a tax grab as you claim, then why don't you reduce the PST component of the HST from 8% to whatever lower level would make the whole change tax-neutral.

"You say that the impact will be lessened by a $1,000 rebate. That's for one year (coincidentally an election year.) What about 2011, 2012 etc. etc.

"Like so much done by your government (the pit bull ban, the ban on young drivers) you have not stopped to think it through!"

It is clear that there are many concerns out there, and this government should take the time to hear from the people across this province with public hearings.

SCHOOL POOLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise today to inform people about a fundraising event at the Earl Grey Senior Public School in my riding. Earl Grey has a swimming pool—one of nine Toronto District School Board pools that are threatened with closing. In fact, this pool will be permanently drained and closed on December 31, 2009, unless the public takes action.

Earl Grey's parent council and members of the Riverdale community are committed to saving Earl Grey's fantastic pool. The pool has a long and rich history within the community, and thousands of students have learned to swim in its waters. An empty pool is of no use to future swimmers.

On Saturday, November 28, between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m., the school council is inviting Earl Grey families, alumni, future swimmers, plus community leaders and business supporters from our community to visit Earl Grey school to collectively send a message. Each message costs $25. Donors can make and put the message on a bottle or paint a supporting brick at the pool.

Just a historical note: Schools that were built in Toronto a number of decades ago that did not have adequate grounds for other sports facilities were given pools so that the children who went there would have that sort of physical outlet, that physical activity. It is wrong that this Liberal government does not provide funding for pools. It is an affront to the people who go to our schools.

NORTH YORK HARVEST FOOD BANK

Mr. Mike Colle: Last week, I was very excited about attending an event at the North York Harvest Food Bank in my riding. The event was organized by the public relations students at Humber College who brought all kinds of canned goods and donations to the food bank. They were all decked out in Christmas gear with their elf costumes on, and they were promoting a reminder for all of us to give at this time of year to our food banks.

I was also able to deliver a donation on behalf of the caring seniors from Caboto Terrace and Casa DelZotto in my riding. These are seniors who, despite being on fixed incomes, found enough time and generosity to donate gift certificates to the North York Harvest Food Bank. So here's to seniors with the students at Humber College showing how important it is to be generous.

The North York Harvest Food Bank distributes one million pounds of food each year and serves over 60 community programs in the area. It's a very generous, hard-working staff that helps a lot of people in need.

I'd like to thank the students of Humber College for their great generosity and also the seniors at Casa DelZotto and Caboto Terrace. This is a great example of seniors getting together with students and helping those amongst us who need a little bit of help at this time of year.

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TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I remind this House that seniors will be among Ontarians hardest hit by this new harmonized sales tax of 13%. We should all recall that November is the month during which we respect seniors in the province of Ontario.

Seniors will be paying 8% more for essential products such as electricity, home heating and gasoline. Health and wellness services will be taxed as well. They are the least able to afford this increase because most seniors are on a fixed income and obviously will have to make choices between paying McGuinty's new tax or having their physical fitness treatment.

This is also a tax on retirement savings and related services such as mutual fund fees, insurance premiums for the home, lawyers' fees, estate planning and accounting, beyond the initial initiatives that we know are going to be the everyday items, like cable TV.

A typical senior couple living in their own home would pay as much as $2,800 per year with this new tax. That's the real story that's not being told. It's no wonder that 72.5% of seniors surveyed by CARP in Ontario and BC are opposed to the harmonized sales tax.

I would urge this House to respect the peace of mind and financial security of seniors by delaying this McGuinty tax grab. Please listen to the people of Ontario. Take their advice and hold public hearings.

PAN AM GAMES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Like so many across Ontario, I was absolutely thrilled to hear the great news of our province's successful bid for the 2015 Pan Am Games.

This sporting event will benefit many areas in Ontario, including the great city of Hamilton. The 2015 Pan Am Games will bring Hamilton significant investment from all levels of government and partners to build new sport facilities and infrastructure. Hamilton has been identified to be the home of a new indoor velodrome, a pool and athletics stadium. These state-of-the-art sports facilities will not only contribute to a successful 2015 Pan Am Games but will continue to keep Hamilton and our communities healthy and active for many years to come.

In addition, the Pan Am Games will increase jobs and tourism to boost our local economies.

I'd like to congratulate Premier Dalton McGuinty; Minister Margarett Best; the mayor of Hamilton, Fred Eisenberger; David Braley; David Adames and many others who have worked so hard to make Ontario's bid successful. Their dedication, vision and hard work have helped to bring tremendous opportunity to Ontario.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Reza Moridi: Our government has made significant progress in improving our public education system. We have reduced class sizes to ensure students receive more attention. Students are now earning higher test scores, and we are making sure more students are graduating from high school. The results are clear: The graduation rate was only 68% in 2003 but today has risen to 77%.

But we want to help even more students reach their graduation ceremony. Our full-day kindergarten program will help to achieve that.

Dr. Charles Pascal found that one in four children start grade 1 behind their peers, and many never catch up. But studies have proven that early education programs have many long-term benefits in cognitive and social skills.

Our full-day kindergarten program will put students on the path to success and keep them from being at risk of falling behind. This important program will start in September 2010 for up to 35,000 four- and five-year-old students. It will be fully implemented for all kindergarten students by 2015.

This full-day learning program will help our students succeed and ensure Ontario's long-term competitive edge.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It was announced this week that the H1N1 vaccine is now available to all Ontarians, regardless of age or medical condition. But as the Premier has noted, our biggest challenge remains: ensuring that all 13 million people in Ontario are willing to roll up their sleeves and get this shot.

It is essential that everyone knows how important this is. The vaccine is safe. Getting it will ensure that we stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus and keep Ontarians healthy.

There are also other measures people should take to stop the spread of germs. For example, it's important to wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. People should sneeze or cough into their sleeves and not in their hands. And if you're sick, you should stay home from work or school and contact your health care provider or Telehealth Ontario.

Our government has committed whatever resources are necessary to make sure we can get a shot in the arm of every Ontarian who wants it. I encourage everyone to roll up their sleeve and get the H1N1 flu vaccine.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Mr. Dunlop from the Standing Committee on Estimates reports the following resolutions:

"Resolved that supply in the following amounts and to defray the expenses of the following ministries be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010:

"Ministry of Economic Development—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Dispense? Agreed? Agreed.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOBY'S ACT (RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT BECAUSE OF GENDER IDENTITY), 2009

LOI TOBY DE 2009 SUR LE DROIT À L'ABSENCE DE DISCRIMINATION ET DE HARCÈLEMENT FONDÉS SUR L'IDENTITÉ DE GENRE

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 224, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code respecting gender identity / Projet de loi 224, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui concerne l'identité de genre.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to Rainbow Health, Trans Health, Georgina Bencsik and Egale, all of whom are in the House today.

This bill amends the Human Rights Code to specify that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of gender identity with respect to: services, goods and facilities—section 1 of the code; accommodation—subsection 2(1) of the code; contracting—section 3 of the code; employment—subsection 5(1) of the code; and membership in a trade union, trade

or occupational association or self-governing profession—section 6 of the code.

The bill also amends the code to specify that every person has a right to be free from harassment because of gender identity with respect to accommodation and employment.

CHILD PROTECTION
PROTECTION DES ENFANTS

Hon. Brad Duguid: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's a unanimous consent statement. I believe that we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak on children's rights day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It is a privilege to rise today to mark the United Nations Universal Children's Day and Canada's National Child Day, which is tomorrow, November 20.

Universal Children's Day has a long-standing history and has been recognized around the world for more than five decades. In Canada, we have officially marked November 20 as National Child Day since the passage of the Child Day Act in 1994. National Child Day commemorates the United Nations' adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, and we are here today celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Cette journée représente notre engagement commun, en tant que nation, en faveur du respect des droits des enfants. Ces droits existent pour que les enfants soient entendus et protégés, et pour qu'ils aient l'occasion de réaliser leur plein potentiel.

This government takes these rights seriously. From protecting children from sexual exploitation with the Child Pornography Reporting Act to providing grade 8 girls with access to the HPV vaccine to doubling our investments in summer jobs for youth through our youth opportunities strategy, we take the responsibility to provide every opportunity and support for kids seriously.

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Sur le plan international, lorsque nous examinons les autres instances, nous constatons que des progrès notables ont été accomplis grâce à la Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant.

Par exemple, en Afrique du Sud nous avons assisté à la création d'un système de justice distinct pour les jeunes; en Finlande, il existe plusieurs initiatives s'inspirant de la convention, qu'il s'agisse de l'éducation de la petite enfance, ou encore, d'un plan d'action visant à réduire la pauvreté.

When we look at Ontario, we see many of those same accomplishments. We are transforming the youth justice system in Ontario, and now we too have a dedicated system designed to support youth in conflict with the law. We too are moving ahead with full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in recognition of the importance of early years in the strong and healthy development of children. We have a poverty reduction strategy enshrined in legislation that focuses first on giving children, youth and their families the support they need to achieve their full potential. We have set an ambitious goal to reduce the number of children in poverty by 25% in five years. Through programs like the Ontario child benefit, we will lift 90,000 kids and their families out of poverty.

J'exhorte aujourd'hui tous les députés de cette Assemblée à réfléchir à la manière dont nous pouvons mieux protéger les droits des enfants, leur permettre de saisir des occasions et les aider à réussir dans la vie.

While we have accomplished so much, we still have so much more to do. On this historic day, it is so important that we restate and recommit to our obligation to ensure that children are treated as equals, that their voices are listened to and respected and that we continue to support and protect them in every way possible.

I want to close with the wise words of Dr. Seuss, from the 1990 story Oh, the Places You'll Go!, to help us celebrate and recognize this historic day:

> Be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray
> Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,
> You're off to Great Places!
> Today is your day!
> Your mountain is waiting.
> So ... get on your way!

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind all of our guests here with us today that we certainly welcome you. As much as you may wish to participate in the debate, you are not allowed to, and that includes applause. But we do welcome you.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would also like to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Universal Children's Day. However, when the minister stands up and talks about all of the wonderful things that the Liberal government has been doing, I cannot let it go by without reminding her about the crisis—and "crisis" is the word, Minister—that the children's aid societies across Ontario are facing right now, today. We have the highest number of children's aid societies that have told you they cannot operate within their mandated budgets and the budget that you have provided them. So while I do want to acknowledge Universal Children's Day, and it is critically important that we talk about the voices and what they have done to raise awareness, I cannot let the minister get away with talking about all the wonderful things the McGuinty Liberals have done for children in this province because it is simply not true.

It is a day for citizens to raise awareness on the numerous obstacles that lie ahead for children around the world. Many children still go to school hungry. Many children do not live in safe, secure and stable homes where they are protected from harm. Many children do not have access to proper health care or mental health care. These issues are ones that all governments, politicians, volunteers and citizens should promote in order to protect our most vulnerable population.

Universal Children's Day is about recognizing the contributions that young people have made to society across a number of interesting and diverse fields. Through their hard work, commitment and determination, many children have served as an excellent example to adults about the difference one person can make in the lives of many, no matter their age.

During today's reception celebrating youth it was important to hear from young people. These are the people who know first-hand the hardships and triumphs youth face every day. I wish that every member could have heard the presentations today. These youth ambassadors are the people who know what is happening in our communities, in our cities. Whether it is a young person facing gang violence, ridicule at school or abuse at home, they are the voices we need to hear and listen to.

I had the pleasure of meeting Yessinia, a 17-year-old student who plans to attend university to study political science and social justice issues. She should be proud of all that she has accomplished already and how much it means to us that she has the confidence to tell her story here today. I know that because of her courage to speak out about her experiences, she will do great things, no matter which career path she chooses.

Universal Children's Day is a day when we celebrate the important contributions that children make in our society, and the important role we have as legislators to improve the lives of children across Ontario.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats are proud to be involved in officially recognizing the 20th anniversary of the November 20, 1999, declaration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. First and foremost, that's what we're here to do today.

I want to commend our provincial child advocate, Irwin Elman, and his staff; all of the Ontario agencies serving children and youth; groups like Defence for Children International—I see Les Horne here, and Agnes Samler, who have both been children's advocates here in the province; of course, we remember Judy Finlay as well, as an excellent child advocate in this province; organizations like UNICEF—all of these people who have worked together to bring this event to the Legislature.

Most of all, I commend the young people who are here with us today as well. I commend them not only for being here but also for their insights and for their interest in building a better world. The young people that we are welcoming today represent the voices of young people all across our province. It is our duty not only to hear what they have to say but to listen to them, to respect their input and act on their concerns.

Whether it's in Ontario, Canada or any jurisdiction in the world, we must look at the issues affecting the young and ask, have we really done everything that we can do in the best interests of the child?

Regrettably, two decades after the historic UN signing, we see indicators that the answer is absolutely no. In some countries, child labour thrives. Sexual exploitation of children is rampant. Basic needs of children the world over for shelter, nutritious food, clean water and education remain unmet.

This is no time for complacency. Our role as legislators and concerned individuals is to protect the basic covenants of the UN convention and to challenge those who abandon those covenants.

Charities and service organizations here and abroad call on us to support their work with children around the globe, but it is here, in legislative chambers and in the offices of governments, that policies and frameworks are introduced and decided upon.

Looking at some of the articles in the UN document, does Ontario measure up? Above all, how would our children and youth answer that specific question? Can they honestly say that the rights of the child are secure when more children than ever before rely on food banks for their meals?

More Canadians rely on food banks now than live in the entire province of New Brunswick. Over 700,000 Canadians access food banks each month for emergency food assistance. And of those assisted, 30%, or 260,000, are children.

Let's remember the words of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on this special day. The Secretary-General said this: "Investing in children and securing their rights is one of the surest ways to ending poverty.

"We are at a critical juncture in the fight against poverty. Now is the time to amplify the voices of the vulnerable and ensure that the world follows up on its pledges."

The opinions of young people matter, just as every article of the convention matters. Would young people agree that their rights to equality and access are protected when they themselves have identified and experienced barriers in their own lives?

The UN declaration says every child is entitled to an education and services for any of their special needs. Well, right here in Ontario, all we have to do is consider children with autism; children with mental health challenges or physical disabilities; children who are not able to get the services they need from our children's aid societies because this government refuses to fund them to an appropriate level; First Nations' children who continue to live in squalor and poverty without schools, without decent homes—that's what's happening to children in the province of Ontario.

1330

So when young people compare what's needed to what's available here in this province, are they going to say that we've done enough? I certainly don't think so. These are the young people who inherit our future. Their voices should be heard and they should be heeded.

The young man I was giving mentorship to is Matthew Massel, who is 15 years old. Matthew is going to be a doctor one day—he's sitting up there in the gallery, sticking his tongue out at me. His path has not been an easy one, but he has triumphed over his challenges, and he's an amazing young man. But also, through first-hand

experience, he has gained a good understanding of the level of the supports that should exist for Ontario's children and youth. The first time I met him he explained to me quite clearly what some of those gaps are that he has experienced. Those are the kinds of observations that we in this House are reminded to heed and act upon, and long before Matthew and his generation take our place.

New Democrats applaud the initiative that is happening here today; there's no doubt about it. We are committed to working with children and youth for positive change.

I'd like to close with a quotation, if I may, that came across my desk recently, and I ask all members to carry this quotation with them: "Our actions are not measured by our intentions but by the impact that they have on others." Today, let's truly commit to impacting children and youth in positive, supportive and respectful ways.

PETITIONS

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank a number of people in the galleries here today who would have signed this petition to save the Elmvale high school.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Elmvale District High School is an important part of the community of Elmvale and surrounding area; and

"Whereas the school is widely recognized as having high educational standards and is well known for producing exceptional graduates who have gone on to work as professionals in health care, agriculture, community safety, the trades and many other fields that give back to the community; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that 'Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them'; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty found $12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn't found any money to keep an actual rural school open in Elmvale;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education support the citizens of Elmvale and flow funding to the local school board so that Elmvale District High School can remain open to serve the vibrant community of Elmvale and surrounding area."

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition from 200 residents in the riding of Sudbury.

"Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and it send it to the table with page Karen.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition gathered by the Canadian Hispanic Congress.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries" from Cuba to Costa Rica to Honduras to Panama to Uruguay and to Venezuela; "and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, film, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned," join MPP Tony Ruprecht and MPP Mike Colle and "call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

I support this petition on Hispanic Ontarians and affix my name to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have hundreds of petitions here to do with the McGuinty sales tax. They read:

"Whereas the McGuinty government is planning to merge the 8% provincial sales tax and the 5% federal sales tax; and

"Whereas the new 13% sales tax will be applied to products and services not previously subject to provincial sales tax such as gasoline, home heating fuels, home renovations, haircuts, hamburgers, television service, Internet service, telephone and cell services, taxi fees,

bus, train and airplane tickets, and dry cleaning services; and

"Whereas rural and northern Ontarians will be particularly hard hit by Mr. McGuinty's new sales tax, as will seniors and families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government should remove the new sales tax from its 2009-10 budget."

I support this petition and give it to Simon.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition in support of proclaiming April as Hispanic Heritage Month, in support of the private member's resolution of December 3 from Mr. Ruprecht and Mr. Mike Colle. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, film, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign my name to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, but before I read it into the record, I would like to reintroduce my guests from the great town of Ingersoll who are in the gallery and who were not here when I did the introductions during the introduction of guests.

The petition is signed by thousands of people from the town of Ingersoll and from the rest of my riding in Oxford county.

"Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

With that, I will sign this petition as I wholeheartedly agree with it.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Mr. Phil McNeely: I have a petition on behalf of the Honourable Jim Watson.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery; these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health care issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts and skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventative reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money as said health issues would cost over time."

I submit this to the Legislature and will send it down with Connor.

1340

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include:

coffee"—that has been changed, actually; I should delete that—"newspapers and magazines"—they've changed that, so I'll delete that section there—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: They maybe will listen up and delete some of the other ones. Anyway, "gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming ... home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services" and finally and least is the "funeral arrangements"—from birth to death;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the" now-dreaded "health tax, which costs upwards of $600 to $900 per individual"—check your income tax. "And now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on ... hard-working families" and have public hearings.

I am pleased to sign and present this petition to Maggie, the page from my riding of Durham.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, submitted to me by the Islamic Society of North America. I especially would like to thank Abid Latif of Oakville, Taqdees Ahmed of Milton and Zulfiqar Saadat of Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Paisley.

HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Since I'm going to be doing a private member's bill on Tiny township, I want to read a petition about Tay township, because His Worship Mayor Scott Warnock is in the audience today. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Waubaushene in the township of Tay has two entrances off Highway 400, one of which is the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp; and

"Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp entrance has had numerous accidents, including fatalities, over the past two decades; and

"Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp entrance is very confusing and awkward for drivers trying to make left-hand turns onto Highway 12 from either Pine Street or the Highway 400 ramp; and

"Whereas the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay have expressed grave concerns over the safety at the Pine Street-Highway 400 and Highway 12 intersection; and

"Whereas there is a strong feeling in the community that traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection would save lives;

"Therefore we petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario support the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay and immediately install traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection."

I'm pleased to sign it and give it to Christopher to present to the table.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is the GO tunnel on St. Clair Avenue and Old Weston Road. It reads as follows:

"Whereas GO Transit is ... planning to tunnel an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West and west of Old Weston Road, making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing; and

"Whereas TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue-Old Weston Road bridge; and

"Whereas this bridge (underpass) will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it's about 50 metres long). It's dark and slopes on both east and west sides, creating high banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow."

I'm delighted to sign my name to this petition.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I'd like very much to thank Lindsay Birmingham of Toronto and Uttam Unnitham from Mississauga for having collected the signatures on these petitions. They read as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region social services providers.... ; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I agree with this petition and I'm pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Valerie to carry it for me.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

WASTE DISPOSAL SITE 41 IN THE TOWNSHIP OF TINY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE LIEU 41 D'ÉLIMINATION DE DÉCHETS DANS LE CANTON DE TINY

Mr. Dunlop moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to prevent the disposal of waste at Site 41 in the Township of Tiny / Projet de loi 32, Loi visant à empêcher l'élimination de déchets sur le lieu 41 dans le canton de Tiny.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today. I want to thank all members for participating in private members' hours this afternoon and I want to thank all the folks who have come down from Simcoe county and around the province to help take part in this debate. We not only have people in the House today but also in our caucus boardroom. Thank you very much.

I would like to begin by thanking a few people. First of all, I'm not going to name everybody here, because you're all friends of supporting of this bill, but I do want to thank the people who helped me this afternoon at the press conference: first of all, the Honourable David Crombie, former mayor of Toronto and a former federal cabinet minister was there—he's in the audience as well—Vicki Monague of the Beausoleil First Nation women, who set up a protest camp at the site; Judith Grant from the Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations; and of course Stephen Ogden, who is an expert, as far as I'm concerned, on site 41.

I want to go through and mention a little bit about the history of this. First of all, to the members of the House: This goes back 30 years, when four municipalities in north Simcoe—Tay, Tiny, Penetanguishene and Midland—as well as some typical smaller municipalities at that time, Victoria Harbour and Port McNicoll, were trying to find a site. I can tell you that it went on—that started in the late 1970s, early 1980s. Then we moved to the fact that a site was selected. However, based on opposition, it was turned down by an environmental tribunal in 1989, only to have the environmental tribunal decision reversed by the Peterson government in 1990. In 1991, the province, of course, took over—they got rid of responsibility for landfills and passed them on to the upper-tier municipalities. That happened in 1991. That's actually when the preparation of the C of A started working through all the different governments, to get to 1998, when it was finally issued.

1350

I will tell you, members of the House, as a member of the county council through those years, we were always told by the Minister of the Environment that this was a perfect site: It had clay and it was flat. And you know what? It was based on an upward gradient. Since then, we've had—we'll get into that in a few minutes.

What happened after that was the Walkerton tragedy and the Walkerton inquiry and all the information that came from that. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that's when people who were sort of silenced in the 1990s came back and said, "Hey, why are we putting up with something that could contaminate our water when the governments of the day are calling for water source protection, and they're looking at all kinds of different clean water acts etc.?" I can remember the first time someone came to my office: Roy Nahuis. He's a dairy farmer in the area. All those in the Nahuis family have large dairy farms. He said, "This is simply wrong."

I'm going to tell you that what really changed my mind and made me believe that we had made a terrible mistake was when I went out to the site with Jim Downer, who's now the mayor of the town of Midland, and Gord Leonard. I actually saw where a test well cap had blown off, and clean, fresh water was spewing into the air four or five feet above the ground. At that time, I thought, "How can we possibly look at putting a landfill on top of this? A mistake has been made."

Of course, not too long after that, the government of the day became the Liberal government. They introduced the Adams Mine Lake Act, and that Adams Mine Lake Act is what I based Bill 32 on, which I introduced originally in 2005. The Adams Mine Lake Act reversed all the approvals, we moved forward and, of course, there will not be a landfill at the Adams mine.

That takes us to all the things that have happened over the years: the introduction of my bill originally, and then we followed through to 2007, when the county of Simcoe looked at the approval of this again, and they voted, by a very narrow margin—16 to 15—to proceed. You can see how contentious it is in that area when the vote was that close. In 2008, last December, the water-taking permit was issued that would allow up to 800,000 litres per day to be pumped out of the ground to construct the landfill for only one year.

At the same time, there were rallies formed, a walk here to Queen's Park—Danny Beaton, Steve Ogden and a group of people walked all the way from site 41 to Queen's Park to oppose it. That followed through to a very important time, in January and February 2009, when the Council of Canadians and Maude Barlow came on side and added a lot of interest to it. But by May 2009, the county proceeded with the construction.

At almost the very same time, Ms. Vicki Monague, who's in the audience today, and the Beausoleil First Nation women had permission to set up a camp directly across the road from the landfill, a camp set up to protest this landfill. What happened after that was amazing, ladies and gentlemen. I can tell you that people from all walks of life, who would maybe not normally co-operate with each other—people in the agricultural community, Beausoleil First Nation, the cottage associations, folks from all around the city and the GTA—were involved. Each and every rally got stronger and stronger, until we got to the point where, at the county council meeting on August 25 of this year, what happened was that the county of Simcoe passed this resolution:

"(1) the public release, and independent review, of all pertinent information concerning the environmental impacts of operating a waste facility at site 41 can occur;

"(2) meaningful consultations take place with local residents and cottagers, First Nations groups and other organizations that have raised concerns about the environmental impacts of establishing a waste facility at site 41; and that

"(3) the suitability of site 41 for waste management use be assessed in light of the source water protection planning mandated by the Clean Water Act."

That resulted in a one-year moratorium being placed on the property in August. But at the very next county council meeting in September, they passed the following resolution: "that construction and all future development of the North Simcoe landfill site (site 41) be discontinued."

What has happened is that we've moved forward here. The county council right now does not plan on building a landfill on that particular site—or so they say. However, there are a number of approvals set in place, and we want to revoke all of those approvals.

We are supported, ladies and gentlemen, members of the House and the Speaker as well, by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, who in 2005 gave a scathing report against this site. As well as that, in 2005, I had asked the Environmental Commissioner, under the Environmental Bill of Rights, for a complete review of the application. I've met with him a number of times. I felt that a mistake had been made—I know a mistake has been made.

What we have a problem with is that this system, this landfill—the plan is based on an upward-gradient water pressure being consistent throughout the year. Keeping the pressure of the water flowing up would stop any leachate from going down. The problem is that we are not given access to the calibrated modflow that would indicate that something else might happen. We do know that in the summertime, it does get much drier. We don't think that there's a consistent upper-gradient pressure, therefore causing leachate that could be forced downwards. And that would contaminate the aquifer.

I should tell you that Dr. William Shotyk from the University of Heidelberg, who is a resident here in Ontario but teaches in Germany, has tested this water, and for the people in the House—many people have already heard this—it has been classed as some of the purest water on the face of the earth; as clean as some of the water even in the glaciers. That's what we're dealing with.

People who are making comments today, who are saying that the site's good and that no mistakes have been made—even the Premier said it was viable, and I think the Minister of the Environment said it was viable. He's never seen the calibrated modflow. The Premier hasn't seen it the minister hasn't seen it, the ministry hasn't seen it, and the county hasn't seen it. Right now, Mr. Steven Ogden has been denied that and is trying to go through the Information and Privacy Commissioner to get the information on the calibrated modflow. That's the fight we're up against. We're not given the proper information on this, and as long as that C of A is in existence, we will have the burden hanging over our head that a landfill could proceed on this particular site.

As we move forward, I'm asking the members of this House to do what they did with the Adams mine lake bill, and that is to support this bill. It does parallel the Adams mine lake bill. It does take away the approvals.

I have to tell you, we're looking at a different world today. There's much more improved technology out there to handle our household waste in this province. I can tell you that we're looking at the same criteria that were established 30 years ago with this upward gradient technology to still maintain the design, or keep the design, or support the design they've got today. We don't buy it. The people in this room don't buy it, the people outside don't buy it, and thousands of people that attended rallies and signed petitions don't buy it as well.

The township of Tiny has been through a lot. They had one landfill 25 years ago that went right through to

Georgian Bay—the plume—because it had contaminated the ground so badly. They had to put up with that, and they've had this hanging over their heads for 30 years. There are better ways to do business in waste management, and putting a landfill on site 41 is not one of them. Keeping the certificate of approval on landfill site 41 is not one of them either.

So I'm asking all members of this House to please support these people here today—support the residents of the county of Simcoe and even support what the county has done by removing the C of A. I think it's important that that's done. It's what our intent was when we started this almost six years ago now. We're at this stage today, and I'd ask all members to support it.

1400

Again, I want to thank all the people in the House who came today for taking the time and effort to support me and this bill. Thanks very much, everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for London–Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I was waiting for the NDP to stand up. I guess they want to reserve their time until the end, to see what we are going to say.

Interjection.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Okay; no problem.

I'm delighted to stand up in my place and speak on this bill. I read a lot about it. Basically, I want to congratulate all the members from Simcoe county, because every other e-mail I received talked about this bill. I received hundreds and hundreds of e-mails asking me to support this bill.

I want to tell you something very important. After I went back to many different avenues of research, I learned that this bill shouldn't be debated here. It's the wrong place to be debating it, because the county of Simcoe already helped development on the site. Also, a resolution was submitted by many different people to the council to withdraw the certificate of approval. The county refused it and voted it down. To my knowledge, from the information which I received from many different avenues, they said that they want to use it as a site for recycling.

Anyway, that's not the issue. If I was in your spot, I'd do the same thing. I did the same thing when the city of Toronto bought land near London to have a landfill site. I felt so bad about it that I protested in many different ways.

As you know—and you should know—it is the government of Ontario's job, and the Ministry of the Environment's job, to give a certificate only according to certain criteria. As the members said a few minutes ago, 30 years ago the Ministry of the Environment issued an approval certificate to allow that landfill to exist in the area. But since that time, with so many different obstacles, that's why it wasn't functioning until now. Also, Simcoe county put a stop on it. Also, many different trials have been taken by the council to withdraw the certificate, which is the right place to take the decision. I think it is not our job as elected officials for the province of Ontario to replace city councillors or county councillors, who are elected by the people of that region, and to take their power away from them and replace it with our power.

I was talking to the Minister of the Environment, who said, "We have no problem whatever. If the Simcoe county councillors and municipalities decide to withdraw the certificate of approval, we have no problem to stop it from our side."

Also, you have to know that there would be a lot of implications if we decided from our side to take the approval. It would be a subject for suing, for compensation for the people who opened that site. I think it's unreasonable; it's unacceptable. We have to look also from our side too.

I believe strongly that the member from Simcoe North is a great advocate on behalf of his constituents. He brought this issue to our attention, and I agree with him that 30 years ago it was different than today. The technology has advanced big time. We recycle a lot of things these days. We have created a lot of elements and a lot of steps to create recycling plants where we can recycle our TVs, electronic parts, batteries and hazardous waste. All of it is taken into consideration as we try to plan to recycle all these elements, to make sure it will be reused or put in a safe place.

I have no problem with supporting the essence of the bill. But I think the member, before introducing this bill, achieved his goal, because the county already put a stop on it, so I'm not sure why we're debating it here today.

If he is asking the government to step up and force the municipalities, we're not going to do that, I think, because it would be interference in the affairs of the municipalities across the province of Ontario. It would be creating a scary and unprecedented step towards eliminating the role of municipalities across the province of Ontario.

In the end, I want to say that it's important to focus on the future, to focus on recycling. Our government has done a lot of good steps towards this area, such as the tire plants to collect tires, with certain fees being put by many different companies together to deal with the tires.

I had the chance à long time ago, with the Attorney General, to visit Staples shops in the city of London, to take a lot of TVs, computers and old equipment to that site to be recycled. A lot of places also, like Home Depots and Canadian Tires, received all the batteries. So I guess we're dealing with the issues.

Also, the five cents that is put on every bag being used by the grocery stores to eliminate the bags—because the bags, as you know, when we throw them out in the environment, suffocate the plants and the trees.

That's why many different things are being put in place by our government to deal with those issues. There's also the blue box program. Many municipalities endorse and support those programs. All these programs are being put in place to see how we can recycle our products, which we can use again.

I want to tell you about a great example from the city of London. In the city of London, we have a company

called Try Recycling. Try Recycling has two plants, one in the north end and one in the south end. They recycle most construction materials, whether it comes from homes or from companies: 90% to 95% goes back to the clients, back to the community, to use again. Whether in the format of chopped wood for gardens, metal, tires, shingles or drywall, all this material is being recycled and being reused.

I wish the municipality of Simcoe would take that avenue into consideration and try to recycle, not use a landfill.

I mention again that the Ministry of the Environment is willing—and I think my colleague the PA for the Minister of the Environment is going to speak on that issue. He can elaborate more and explain what is our position.

Thank you for allowing me to stand up and speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to support Bill 32, the Waste Disposal Site 41 in the Township of Tiny Act, 2008, introduced by my colleague the member from Simcoe North. I want to commend the member from Simcoe North for his efforts on this issue and for his tireless work on behalf of his constituents.

I also want to recognize all of the many members of the community who have worked on this issue for many years and put in countless volunteer hours. I want to commend them for their dedication. I know that earlier today, many of them demonstrated that dedication by holding a rally in support of this bill on the front lawn in the pouring rain. I want to thank them for their commitment and for coming to Queen's Park to take part in that process.

I can relate to them. I actually got into politics opposing a landfill site like site 41. My first time here in this chamber was sitting up in the gallery, where these members are now sitting, invited as a guest of Mel Swart, who was the former member from Thorold, because we were opposed to the landfill site going into what would now be called my backyard.

For our site, we had the longest hearing—it was a consolidated hearing board—the Ministry of the Environment and the Ontario Municipal Board—59 days of hearings with this joint board, and at the end of the 59 days, the decision came out that the site was not to be built. The county had not proven that it would be a sufficient site. The provincial government then decided that because of the process that was in place, the landfill site should go ahead.

The reason I tell this story is not related to my landfill site; it is to illustrate that the system is not infallible. It illustrates the reason the licence on site 41 needs to be revoked, so that if someone in the future came along and decided they wanted to put a dump on that site, they couldn't skip any steps or sneak it in the back door on the old licence.

The municipality proposed a site, put forward all the evidence and decided not to proceed with it. That should tell us something about the safety of locating a site there. In fact, in 2004, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, Mr. Gord Miller, stated in his annual report that a review on the approval of site 41 should be undertaken. When the Environmental Commissioner has expressed concern and the municipality has said no, I think it just makes sense that we don't let the old licence and the old assessment stand.

Again, I want to commend my colleague from Simcoe North for bringing forward this important bill and the many people in the gallery for their work to protect the environment of their community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This is a story where courage has not been a stranger. This is a story where tenacity has not been a stranger. But unfortunately, this is also a story where stupidity has not been a stranger.

This event, this matter before us, has had a long history, starting with Simcoe county's search for a dump site in 1979. A site was proposed: 20.6 hectares of prime farmland with a potential for 40,000 tonnes of domestic and commercial waste a year.

In November 1989, following an environmental assessment of the site, the public hearing board decided not to approve the landfill site—so some intelligence was reflected. It glimmered in the darkness and someone understood that this would not be a good decision. However, in June 1990, just two months prior to their election defeat, the Peterson government cabinet required the hearing to resume. On September 22 this year, Simcoe county council voted to discontinue plans for a dump. Again, some hope is out there in the world.

1410

This victory is a result of years of sacrifice and struggle by an unprecedented coalition of residents, farmers, First Nations and environmentalists: Danny Beaton of the Turtle Clan and Mohawk nation, dairy farmer Ann Nahuis—and Ann, if I've mispronounced your name, my deepest apologies—Anishnawbe mother of three Vicki Monague, Stephen Ogden, community leader of Stop Dump Site 41, and 85-year-old farmer Keith Wood and his wife Ina. We owe all of these and others a debt of gratitude for standing up and protecting our shared natural environment. They have paid a great price. They gave hundreds and hundreds of hours of their time. Many were arrested and still face criminal charges. Some face hundreds of thousands of dollars in lawsuits. Without doubt, this is the courage part of this story.

The struggle is not over. Activists remain concerned that the existing certificate of approval could be transferred to a purchaser of the land and the dump could still proceed. They're calling for a revocation of the certificate of approval so that they can ensure that a future county council doesn't reverse the decision to cancel the landfill at site 41. Revocation would ensure that no sale of the site could be made to a private landfill operator.

Now, here is the stupid part of the story: Notwithstanding the clarity that a mistake was made when this

approval was given, we are now hearing from the government that they don't believe they have to correct the problem by revoking the certificate of approval. I have to say that in saying this is a government that does not intervene with local decisions, I would ask people to look at the record of the last four short years that I've been here, because there has been no hesitation to intervene in the affairs of the municipalities, none that I've been able to detect—not when it is of consequence for the government.

So I have to say that the C of A should be revoked. Its issuance was a mistake in the first place. Simply saying that it's up to the council to ask for a revocation is abandoning the responsibility of the province to protect the environment; it should be acting. It should mean that if in the future the site were considered for some other aspect of garbage management—and who can predict what that might be—then a new certificate of approval would have to be sought, and that certificate of approval would reflect current high standards of management of groundwater and prime agricultural land. Site 41 is simply the wrong place for a dump.

I haven't been in this Legislature that long. I came here in a by-election in 2006. One of the issues that I was given early on as environment critic was site 41, and I think there were probably a number of you here when I had my first opportunity to go and make a speech out in front of the Legislature. Before I spoke, I got to listen to your speakers talk about the tests on the water, its purity and the reality of how water travels not in a straight line—some believe that it does. Others who've dealt with water see that it flows and it cannot be predicted all of the time where it will go. I found it extraordinary that people were having to rally out in front of Queen's Park on this issue. I found it extraordinary that they were having to drive down, take a bus down or whatever to Queen's Park to point out the stupidity of that decision. But they had to, they did and they continue, as they have today, to come down to stand up for the environment of all of us here in Ontario.

Numerous experts, groups and communities have said that this is the wrong place, respected people like Maude Barlow, David Suzuki, David Crombie and Angus Toulouse, Regional Chief of Ontario; people like Gord Miller, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, who has expressed repeated concern about the site and the MOE's issuing and then refusing to review a certificate of approval for the site.

The Environmental Commissioner has made it clear that there are too many unanswered questions about the dump. It is unacceptable to drain and contaminate the Alliston aquifer, one of the cleanest sources of fresh water in the world. There is no proof that seepage of the dump—leachate into the water table—will not occur.

In the warmer weather, there was a demonstration—again, probably by many of you who are here today—at Avenue Road and St. Clair in front of the Ministry of the Environment. I think the digging had just recently commenced on the site, and a number of people brought down bottles of contaminated water—water that had run crystal clear previously—cloudy with sediment. Bottles were given to the minister there in front of the Ministry of the Environment, and he said, "Well, I don't know if these bottles haven't been previously contaminated. I don't know if they were clear." I have to say to all of you, okay, fair enough, you can ask that question, although I think it's unlikely that people would put a lot of silt in the bottles and bring them down. But let's say you asked that question. Did you send your inspectors up to see if contamination was going on? Was that done? Because it is entirely logical to me that if you have a lot of water flowing there and you start digging and disturbing the land, you are going to get contamination. And if, in fact, you didn't check it out, then that is negligence. And if you checked it out and found that contamination was happening, why are we not hearing about that? I understand that access to the water studies has been denied. There has been an ongoing fight about this, and you, the citizens, can't get access to those studies.

In the course of that first demonstration the argument was made, as you've just made, Mr. Dunlop, that in the summer the flow of water changes and what is an upwelling in the spring becomes a down flow in the summer. If that's the case, then frankly there is a huge problem. The simple nature of landfills is that (a) they leak and (b) they're messy. That's all there is to it. That's the simple reality, and predicting the flow of water is at best an inexact science, even given a potential report.

For what it's worth, I have been a property manager running apartment buildings, and I have to tell you, dealing with leaks was one of the things that made us most crazy, because finding how the water travelled through what is a relatively uncomplex object—an apartment building—is very complicated. You can't imagine what it must be going through layers of rock and clay and soil to predict what's going on and not going on.

If we are actually going to take on this issue in this province, we have to take on the larger waste issue as well. This government, the McGuinty government, has talked about a zero-waste future. It brought out papers back in 2003 about a 60% to 70% reduction in waste. We have not seen the action on that. That would allow us to dramatically reduce the use of landfills. We have not seen the sort of investment that's needed to support municipalities who want to put in place recycling and reduction programs that would ease the pressure on these sorts of initiatives.

We have been going in the wrong direction, and opening a dump on a pristine and sensitive aquifer sends absolutely the wrong message to Ontarians. It tells Ontarians that it's fine to keep dumping and not trying to develop the alternatives. It says to Ontarians that we can assume that our water sources are infinite and that we can contaminate as much as we want because there's always going to be more. Well, neither of those things are true. It's my experience in this chamber, speaking to you who've worked hard and taken the time to defend this

land, this water and this community, that these sorts of decisions to ignore the environmental realities have brought many other citizens like you to this chamber in the past, people from Oakville, Mississauga, people from the Holland Marsh who are fighting unnecessary gas-fired peak power plants, people who have been concerned about the health effects of polluting diesel trains in west Toronto when the reality says that we must move on to clean electric trains. We have had the Environmental Commissioner repeatedly calling for a redress of the imbalance between developers and companies, on the one hand, and communities on the other.

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The McGuinty government promised in its 2007 election platform "to make Ontario a leader on the environment." I want to say that it could take one small, useful step today and vote in favour of Garfield Dunlop's private member's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to enter into this debate on Bill 32, An Act to prevent the disposal of waste at Site 41 in the Township of Tiny.

I think this is just a great opportunity to recognize yet again that truly all politics is local. We've seen, obviously, within the township of Tiny and far beyond, tremendous interest in the situation at site 41. Indeed, as our colleague from Simcoe North has said, this site has had a very, very long history.

I really believe, though, that one of the major objectives that Mr. Dunlop has had in putting forward Bill 32 has already been achieved. As we have heard, Simcoe county council has chosen to permanently halt development of the site, and that main objective has therefore been achieved.

We, as a government, believe that municipalities are mature entities, fully able to take responsibility for what in fact is one of their major responsibilities, and that is the safe disposal of waste from their municipality. In other words, what we see in front of us in Bill 32 is essentially unnecessary to be discussed in this chamber. It simply requires a resolution of Simcoe county council to ask the Ministry of the Environment to revoke the certificate of approval, and that will occur. I've had the opportunity to speak personally with the minister on this very subject, and he is awaiting that resolution from Simcoe county council in order to ask his ministry officials to take that action.

But there's another aspect to Bill 32, and that's the aspect of compensation. I understand that, in fact, Bill 32 would require the province to reimburse the corporation of the county of Simcoe for expenditures beyond the fair market value of the land incurred while undertaking planning, study and any design work of the proposed waste site, as well as legal fees incurred by the county with respect to site 41.

This is the aspect of the bill that I feel is truly unreasonable. I think it's unreasonable to expect the province to compensate a municipality for expenditures which were incurred as a result of local planning and design and legal action which arose as a result of decisions made completely by the local level of government. Therefore, I think it's quite clear that the responsibility for this decision does rest with the county of Simcoe.

I have been told by Ministry of the Environment officials that the county is developing a master waste management plan and is considering, among other issues, what exactly site 41 could potentially be used for. We expect that as a result of their master plan, the Ministry of the Environment will be informed as to the wishes of the municipality in this regard.

I'd like to just further echo some of the comments made by my colleague from London–Fanshawe. This government does take waste diversion very seriously, as did the previous government. The Waste Diversion Act was passed by the previous government, and their actions have further been enhanced with the creation of Waste Diversion Ontario. So we do have programs now across the province related to household hazardous waste, e-waste, tires, blue box review and, in fact, the zero waste vision. Our government takes these initiatives extremely seriously. We're anticipating very positive results. We're pleased to know that municipalities will have some assistance in this regard through Waste Diversion Ontario.

Certainly some municipalities have taken the lead through the years on these initiatives. I worked for many years for the region of York and I know that our household hazardous diversion days started to occur in the early 1990s. As an example, we initiated the proper disposal of needles and syringes from diabetics. These were collected on household hazardous waste days and disposed of properly almost 20 years ago.

So, as we know, some municipalities take greater action; some take less. All I can say is that the citizens of the county of Simcoe—in particular, Tiny township—have shown their effectiveness in this regard by their actions to date. I would urge that they ensure that Simcoe county council give further thought to requesting that the Ministry of the Environment revoke the certificate of approval, should that be their wish; otherwise, of course, to wait for the master plan as it relates to waste in Simcoe county.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm very pleased to stand and speak today in support of my colleague Garfield Dunlop, the MPP for Simcoe North, as we debate his private member's bill that would remove the certificate of approval for site 41 in Tiny township.

Tiny township is a place I know well. I grew up on a farm very close to site 41, and one of my brothers continues to farm in the community. This is where I learned the values that I use every day: the values of hard work; the values of having faith in your government and faith that your elected representatives will do what's right, not what is fastest; values that I believe the county of Simcoe ultimately used this fall when they finally

stopped work on site 41, a council full of individuals not unlike this chamber; and hopefully, values we will use today here in the Ontario Legislature as we finally revoke the certificate of approval once and for all.

I want to read an excerpt from one e-mail I received last night, because sometimes in this chamber during our partisan debates we forget that our actions have a real impact on people:

"It has been a very difficult season for the agricultural community this summer." I love farmers; they're the kings of understatement. "The native community, the shoreline owners and the ag community have become quite close because of this adversity."

If anything positive has come from this summer's protest at site 41, it is this: that groups from across the spectrum, with differing interests and political affiliations, have come together to fight site 41. The province's own Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, has identified this area as highly sensitive and needing a complete review and that the MOE should have not given the approvals that it did.

Why are we so unwilling to listen to our own experts? Gord Miller was appointed by the Ontario government to monitor and report on environmental concerns across Ontario. Why can't we step back and admit that, yes, standards have changed and we need to remove this C of A before more damage is done?

Protestors from Christian Island, cottagers and farmers were left with one final option: Protest at the site and block the build at site 41. And some were arrested. I don't know everyone who protested, Speaker; you probably know more than I do. But I do know some, and Keith and Ina Woods aren't criminals. These are hard-working contributors in north Simcoe who believe in their elected officials, and when they were let down, they did the only thing left to them: They protested. And they got arrested. Shameful. Shameful that it must come to a private member's bill by Garfield Dunlop to finally and truly bury site 41.

I support the intent of Bill 32 and trust that the government can do the same. Show that sometimes it's not about being Liberal or PC or NDP. Today let's show that it's about being right about what is good for Simcoe county.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and support Bill 32, but more importantly to support Garfield Dunlop. The passion and work he has put into this is something he and his community should be proud of. I certainly wanted to speak on it because of what I've seen Garfield Dunlop do over the last couple of years, working with the municipal level, working with the stakeholders regardless of partisanship, and trying to do the right thing for the common good. That's the ultimate purpose here: the common good. At the end of the day, it was the right thing to do. And he has served in local government, so he knows how contentious waste issues are.

Besides that, to mirror the work that Garfield has done, I'm almost in the same position in my riding of Durham, with a similar kind of background as well, having served locally for 10 or so years prior to coming here, where partisanship often gets in the way of doing the right thing. What is so important here is simply doing the right thing. This isn't about politics; this is about water or waste. That's ultimately the question we're asking.

Now, how does it apply to the experience in my riding of Durham? What's important here is, if I look back in history—and we learn from the experience of history—back in 1993 Ruth Grier was the minister and there was a process set up called the Interim Waste Authority. Peter Tabuns, the member, would know all about it. The Interim Waste Authority's terms or scope were that each region would site its own solution to its own waste.

It was a reasonable solution, of the solutions of the day that were available. In fact, at the time the government had actually banned incineration as one of the solutions or options. So they really put them in the box and said, "Find a dump site in your riding." Well, the technology has changed, both from seismology and groundwater and aquifer issues to the issues of other solutions, most of which is reduction at source. We should all be in support of what Garfield is trying to do; that is, to say, "That was then; this is now; offer some new options."

I can recall the work that was done by Walter Pitman under the Interim Waste Authority. The member Ms. Savoline, the former chair of Halton region, would know as well; she has many years' experience in this area.

What was determined at that time—Durham had ended up with about five sites and it was kind of a solution that two or three of them were in the area where I was the councillor at the time. So I was under the same sort of heat to say, "Well, no one really thought of anything besides a big hole in the ground where you throw things in and hopefully they disintegrate," causing leachates and methane, which are probably bigger environmental hazards, besides contaminating groundwater. The site there was called Graham Creek. I won't go any further, because that was an old site that had been closed years ago and had never been decommissioned or decertified as a C of A at that time. The C of A at that time dated back to the late 1970s. So you can see how time has changed.

It's time for the Liberal members—this is private members. Please don't let Premier McGuinty whip you into doing the wrong thing.

Mr. Bob Delaney: John, get off it.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, Bob. Bob—if I could only think of his name. He is the one who—

Interjection: Petition.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, it's not Bob Petition.

If the member for Mississauga–Streetsville wants to do the right thing—we'll watch the vote; I think we need a recorded vote on this. This is what I would be encouraging you to do.

I have the greatest respect for the previous member who spoke, the member for Oak Ridges–Markham, probably the most qualified person in this room today as the medical officer of health for the region of York—highly qualified. I listened to what she said, but I'll also be watching the way she votes. I think she's been whipped into voting—it's almost like Bill 218, the HST bill. A lot of them are getting the same calls. They know the impact on seniors. Bill 218 is going to cause an increase of about $2,800 per family, but they're going to be whipped to vote. Some of them will lose their seats, no doubt.

My point, though, is this: Today we have the opportunity to do the right thing. Forget the partisanship and the fact that we disagree with you on the HST; on this thing we can all agree. I would urge you to support Bill 32. It will be a recorded vote, and I hope Garfield sends it out to the ridings that vote in support of it, and also, more importantly, the ones that vote against it. Simply do the right thing. The people will reward you for standing up for the people of Ontario and doing the right thing, at the right time, today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Honourable member, Mr. Dunlop, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Oxford, London–Fanshawe, Toronto–Danforth, Oak Ridges–Markham, Durham, and Dufferin–Caledon for their comments today—and to Mary and Vic, didn't I tell you she was doing a good job? Every time I see Mary and Vic, I say, "Your niece is doing a fantastic job," and Sylvia is doing a great job here.

I appreciate all the comments made by people here today. I'm hoping that your comments will turn into a supportive vote when we get to the voting portion today.

I wanted to say to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham that we're not asking anything different with this bill than we got with the Adams Mine Lake Act, which was a compensation type bill. In the bill, any compensation has to be rewarded by the Legislative Assembly, so it's not locked into that specifically. There is an opening there for all kinds of debate and accounting etc.

As far as the county of Simcoe, this has been a terrible time for the people opposing this project, because there's been a lack of trust with the county. If you are telling me it is as simple as the county of Simcoe sending a resolution to the Ministry of the Environment to revoke it, you know what? I've got to tell you something: I don't think that's going to happen. We'll try it, though. If you don't support it today, that's the next step; there's no question about it. There are county councillors in this audience today.

But do you know what? It would be good for this whole House, good for this whole Parliament, if we, as people supporting private members' bills or opposing them, voted in a non-partisan manner and supported this bill and supported all these people who are here today who don't want a landfill contaminating the precious groundwater of Tiny township.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That concludes the time allocated for Mr. Dunlop's private member's ballot. For those of you in the galleries, our guests and those at home, we will vote on this item in about 100 minutes.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (ALTERNATE INSURANCE PLANS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (RÉGIMES D'ASSURANCE CONCURRENTS)

Mr. Hillier moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 219, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to provide employers with the right to participate in alternate insurance plans / Projet de loi 219, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail pour accorder aux employeurs le droit de participer à des régimes d'assurance concurrents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm introducing this bill today. I believe it's apparent to everyone in this province that the WSIB is indeed broken. It does not serve employers well. It does not serve employees, as well. It really serves no one except itself.

I'm introducing this bill after many conversations and discussions throughout the province on how to fix the problems of WSIB. This bill in essence allows WSIB to continue, but it subjects it to the rigours and the disciplines of the marketplace.

At the present time, we all know that the WSIB is an exclusive monopoly. It's mandated, legislated by government to be the only provider of workplace insurance.

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Now, we've spent decades trying to fix WSIB. We've tinkered with it. We've made policies to modify it. We've tried to make it operate efficiently, to actually earn money and provide quality service to those injured workers. We've done all these changes, all these tinkerings, but nothing changes with WSIB, and that is, of course, because we're failing to recognize the nature of that beast, that exclusive monopoly. There's no monopoly that provides quality service at low cost. It can't look for efficiencies, it can't improve its services, and it will not lower its rates.

I was hoping the Minister of Labour would be here today to engage in this discussion as well, but I'm sure he's listening in.

This is a self-serving monopoly, and it's $12 billion in debt now. It has an unfunded liability of over $12 billion,

and we're on the hook for that. That is money that has to be recaptured by the WSIB. It's going to come from either less benefits or higher rates or a combination of both, and at a time when our businesses and industries are feeling the pains and hardships of a recession, we cannot be looking at putting more and more costs on them, making them less competitive.

Just to put this in perspective, when I was speaking with the chair of the WSIB, he was somewhat boastful to me that about 20% of their claimants are dissatisfied and disapprove of the way their claims are handled. He thought a 20% complaint rate was pretty good. Can you think of any other business where two out of every 10 customers were dissatisfied? How long would that business stay in business? The only reason they can sustain such high levels of dissatisfaction is because they are a monopoly.

When we looked around doing research on how to solve this, I began to look at other jurisdictions. I know some people on the opposite side will think that this is a radical change, a radical departure for us, to move into private insurers competing, so I looked at some of those bastions of public options, such as the United Kingdom. I'll let everybody here in this House know that the United Kingdom does not have a public insurer for workplace safety. It is only by private insurers.

We also looked at South Australia. That was an interesting one because in 1986, they found themselves in a similar predicament to Ontario. They brought in the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act in 1986. This act gave employers the right to choose insurance through the state-owned enterprise, WorkCover, a self-insurance plan, or another private insurer. The effects of privatizing workplace insurance in South Australia have been significant: lower premiums in less than a year. Employers retain the freedom to have choice in purchasing workplace insurance. Insurance providers had financial incentives for innovation and improving the quality of coverage. Here's an interesting one: The return-to-work times became half of those under the public system. That was in 1986—huge changes. This is South Australia.

Also, the state of Nevada, in 1999, had mandatory workplace insurance, a public provider. Again, they found themselves in very similar circumstances to Ontario. The state insurance provider was in enormous debt, losing money every year—very comparable to the WSIB. In 1999, they changed, and that has all changed. The compensation rates have dropped significantly in Nevada. They used to be one of the 10 most expensive states in the United States; now they are around the national average and 23% below where they were before. The $2.2-billion debt that they were facing has now been completely eliminated and all 1,000 employees of the publicly run workplace insurance provider were transferred to jobs in the private sector. On top of that, benefits rose by 15% under that move from a public insurer to a private insurer.

Many people think that the system that we have is the only system that is available to us. There are many options, and my bill speaks to those options. It gives people choice. I know that there are some people in this House on the other side to whom the idea of personal choice is not welcome, but choice is options, and options give us competitive industries and allow our industries to be competitive.

Just a few more steps for the members to ponder over when we debate this bill: Ontario has fewer lost-time injuries than both BC and Alberta together. However, we have higher employer premiums and poorer funding levels, and our benefits always exceed our revenues. That's just a comparison between BC and Alberta and ourselves.

Here's an interesting one: In 1988—I think this explains the nature of this bureaucracy and this monopoly—the WSIB employed 23 people for every 1,000 lost-time injuries. So for every 1,000 lost-time injuries, they had 23 people employed. That number now is 70 employees for every 1,000 lost-time injuries—quite a significant rise in the bureaucracy. This is what I meant by, "It serves itself." We also know that the WSIB has over 200 senior employees making over $100,000 per year. I believe it's 226—and of course the chairman is not included because he's a volunteer, even though he received $140,000 last year as a volunteer.

I think the picture should be getting clear for everyone: significant wages—we are seeing a significant reduction in lost-time injuries, but the WSIB keeps losing money and keeps losing more and more. The fewer injuries we have, apparently, the more money we lose with the WSIB. If these trend lines continue, if we get down to zero injuries, it will be billions and billions of dollars they lose every year.

This is not the way a business operates. When their liabilities are reducing, they should not be adding to their debt. There has been a huge and significant decline in injuries over the last number of years, and that's a great thing. However, it's getting worse that the WSIB continues to lose more and more money as their lost-time injuries improve—go down.

Those are just a few examples. South Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Nevada all have private insurers in their system and are all doing far better than we are. Again, we're in a recession. We're looking at ways to reduce costs for employers. I'll just reiterate this one fact: This bill makes it mandatory for private insurers to deliver the same level of coverage as what's mandated to the WSIB, so there can be no reduction in the quality of benefits or the level of benefits.

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But I'll tell you, with hundreds of insurance companies competing for that marketplace, we will see a marked improvement in the quality of service, and hopefully—and I am sure—we will see a huge reduction in the number of complaints and the dissatisfaction level of injured workers with WSIB.

I am confident in saying this: Every member in this House has a stack of files from injured workers who are

dissatisfied, upset, angry at the treatment that they receive at the hands of this monolithic monopoly called the WSIB.

We must move to make some improvements—and improve it so that we're not continually tinkering with it—and stop these decades of problems with the WSIB.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a pleasure and a privilege to rise in this House, because we rise representing, in my case, almost 100,000 people, and not only the 100,000 people of my riding but the people across Ontario.

I have to say that I'm going to vote against this, for the obvious reason that we in the New Democratic Party do not support the privatization of an essential service like this. We don't support the privatization of health care either, which is a corollary system.

If you want to see what it looks like to privatize a system of delivery of an essential service, look to the United States, where health care is more expensive than here and delivers less service, and where huge swaths of the American public don't get health care at all; hence the attempt to make some reforms, to come closer to the system we have here.

What we would like to see with the WSIB is that more people are covered by it. About a third of Ontarians are not covered by WSIB coverage.

Having said that—and I'll go into this in more detail—does that mean that we support boondoggles like the eHealth scandal? No. We'd love to see electronic health records. We'd love to see our health care system run efficiently, where $1 billion isn't siphoned off for consultants or friends of the government.

The same with the WSIB: We would love to see the WSIB run efficiently, where the chairperson is not taking trips to China. I ask this House: What—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Exactly: What can you learn in China about workplace safety? Good question. Nothing, I would think. But that was done on the taxpayers' dime.

So there are two different issues here: privatization versus public delivery of systems; and the efficient, conscientious delivery of those public systems.

I can agree with the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington about the efficient delivery of public systems. I can also agree: That, we're not getting from the WSIB, and I'll go into why I don't think that's happening.

I agree with you: Do we have injured workers who are unhappy with WSIB? Oh, yes, we do. In fact, we've had demonstrations by injured workers outside the front of this place, complaining about how little they get. But let me tell you, if you want to contrast their experiences with the experiences of the third who aren't covered by private insurance, you're going to hear even more horror stories.

It just so happens that I have a friend who is a lawyer—a lawyer—who was disabled while on the job. Her stories of dealing with a private insurance company to collect her disability would make your hair stand on end, and she's a lawyer. They tried to take her to court. She had to fight for everything, and she didn't get anywhere near the benefits she would have gotten if she had been on a construction site and covered by WSIB.

Private corporations—and let me say this: I used to have my own business. I know what it's like to be in business. In business, you want to make a profit. Nobody goes into business without the intent of making a profit. The problem is that when you deliver essential services—like health, like WSIB services—where does the profit come from? It comes from the services being cut—that's usually what happens—and the inefficient delivery of the services. It comes from somewhere, which is why we of the New Democratic Party fight against the privatization of our hospitals, fight against the privatization of our health care—that is creeping in, by the way, in Ontario already—and fight against the privatization of the delivery of those essential, necessary supports for disabled workers—absolutely. Those supports have to be covered. That's part of being human, in the same way that we would fight against the privatization of education or anything else that we think is an essential public service. It doesn't mean that business shouldn't thrive; absolutely, it should. It doesn't mean that business shouldn't make a profit, just not here.

Let's just go over what some of the problems are. First of all, benefits paid by WSIB ordinarily are higher than private insurers and cover a broader range of services than are included in the great majority of private insurance policies. Again, here the New Democratic Party would like to see those benefits extended. In fact, we're about to table a bill—it's going to be my private member's bill—that's going to ask the WSIB to extend coverage to cover post-traumatic stress disorder for front-line workers. We have EMT, police and firefighters whom we ask to go into battle. There's no other way of describing what they do every day. They go into some horrendous situations where trauma is sometimes part of the outcome in the same way that it is for our armed forces, and yet there's no coverage for that. So we responded to stakeholders' demands for that, stakeholders who came to see us who were EMT professionals, police professionals, who said, "Some members are on post-traumatic stress disorder leave, but there's no coverage for them." We think that's wrong. We think we need to do much, much better at supporting our police force, our firefighters, our EMTs, and we think that those particular disorders should be covered by WSIB—and they do too, by the way. Police, firefighters and EMT professionals would love to see WSIB coverage extended, not curtailed.

Benefits rates can exceed the 66% wage loss rate ordinarily paid by private insurance companies because, let's face it, depending on what you're making, it's very difficult to live on two thirds of what you made. Benefits include loss of retirement income, which you don't get from private insurers, usually. The bottom line: WSIB just treats workers better.

The second falsehood, I think, is that small businesses are required to repay claims expenses and that they receive premium increases when claims are made. The fact is that the majority of employers are covered under no-fault collective liability insurance. They're covered for all claims and administrative costs through their premiums. In a nutshell, that's why we're not supporting the bill.

Here are some of our concerns. To be fair, is WSIB operating like a well-oiled machine? Absolutely not. What are some of the problems with WSIB that we would like to see changed, and changed tomorrow? I talked about extension of coverage. There are several problems right now. First and foremost is the experience rating system. For those out there who perhaps are lucky enough never to have had to deal with the WSIB, they wouldn't know what this is. Essentially what the system does, presumably, is reward companies for their lack of injuries, but in fact what it does is reward companies for their lack of claims. This is very similar to the private insurance industry, by the way. Just imagine what that looks like. What it looks like on many job sites is raffle draws or free trips if you don't put in an injury claim. Well, you can imagine, in this recessionary economy, what that looks like for people desperate for a job. It doesn't look like fewer injuries, necessarily; it just looks like fewer claims. Injuries are covered up or they're not reported, or they're not reported well so the company can get their bonus. That has been going on.

In fact, we estimate that over $2 billion in rebates have gone to companies in the past 10 years without any sign at all that the program has actually reduced injuries—two billion precious taxpayers' dollars. That's wrong, and that should be changed. We should get rid of the experience rating system immediately. It doesn't work. It doesn't work for workers, it doesn't work for taxpayers—it simply doesn't work.

There's one example here, by the way, of a United Steelworkers—there were a fishing boat and trailer located at the plant gate. Everyone who did not have a lost-time injury had their name go into the draw for the boat and trailer. Well, you can imagine.

At any rate, over a million workers have been denied WSIB coverage. That's another problem; I touched on this a little bit. About a third of the workforce in Ontario is not covered, and we in the New Democratic Party believe that that's not right, any more than it would be right to have a third of the workers in Ontario not covered by health care insurance. We think that WSIB needs to be extended.

1500

Finally, getting back to the problems of the WSIB, one of the most serious problems is the decline of Ontario's health safety system. We're talking here about committee certification. All companies of 20 or more employees are supposed to have a joint health and safety committee, and they're supposed to have trained members of that committee. This is part of the WSIB mandate. Workers have the right to inspect the premises, whistle-blow, refuse unsafe work and collectively participate in the joint committee with management. Employers are responsible for supporting the joint committees and responding to their recommendations. The government is supposed to enforce the rights and responsibilities of both the employers and employees. But we found, in government agencies, that, in fact, less than half of companies are meeting that mandate—less than half. Again, there's a real problem with the delivery of a public service paid for by taxpayers' dollars.

Just to sum up: Do we agree with the privatization of the WSIB? Absolutely not, any more than any other public service. It would be the same as privatizing health care, which we would be adamantly against. In fact, I just came back from a conference in the United States, where it was funny because I said, "You know, despite all the misinformation that flies around the American media, we are uniform in our support of public health care in Canada." There's no debate because we've lived with it. We know what it's like. We know its shortcomings. We see the eHealth boondoggles. We know it can be badly implemented. But by and large, it's way better than what they have down there.

The same goes for the WSIB. We see its problems. We see its problems of implementation. We see the boondoggles. We see the placement of Liberals in high places. We see the unwarranted trips, the unwarranted paycheques, the unwarranted dinners, yada yada—the usual boondoggle stuff that goes on with taxpayer dollars. But would we replace it with a private system? Not on your life. Those who have had to go to a private system, they know first-hand what a nightmare it can be to try to collect—particularly, when you are disabled, to try to collect.

So I'm sorry, my friend; I'm not going to support you on this one. We're not going to support you on this one. Can more be done to tighten up life at the WSIB and the delivery to injured workers? Oh, yeah; absolutely, yes. No question about that. That's where we can agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you for the opportunity to unequivocally state how wrong and destructive Mr. Hillier's proposal is for employers and workers in this province. Mr. Hillier states that he has done some research. I question his research, and I think that a lot of it is wrong.

According to what I know, the only contact he's had with the WSIB is the one meeting with the chair. I would encourage him to take a trip to the WSIB and see all the good work that they do, because I had the opportunity to go to their offices for a half-day tour. I tell you, they do a lot more than just write cheques for injured workers.

In fact, for kids, they start really early. They have all kinds of material for kids, and I had the opportunity to take some pamphlets to distribute to my son's class. The teachers were really appreciative of all the stuff that the kids learned about safety. They start them really young, and I was very impressed with what they do.

I know from talking to the business, labour and injured worker communities that the current integrated model is the right model for addressing workplace injuries and illnesses. We need to continue to work together to ensure that everyone who goes to work comes home safely, and when they do not, we have a system that addresses the needs of both employers and workers.

Mr. Hillier's proposal is to allow employers to opt out of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, which is not only wrong but, in my view, very dangerous. He's talking about a concept that has been rejected by every other jurisdiction.

He mentioned places. He mentioned New Zealand. I would argue that he's incorrect because New Zealand went this way and they had to come back because it wasn't the right thing and it didn't suit the needs of the injured workers.

He's talking about a concept, again, that has been rejected. All Canadian provinces and territories have a similar system to the WSIB in Ontario. He's proposing to lead us into uncharted waters when such divergence is not needed nor warranted. Again, he mentioned that New Zealand—which has been down this road—realized after a year that it was a mistake and went back to a public system with certainty of coverage, stable rates and secure benefits for workers.

The WSIB system is not perfect; I think we all agree and recognize that. There can be, and need to be, improvements to the system. However, those improvements come by working together in a system that employers, labour and injured workers have been involved in for almost a century.

Looking to third party insurers is not the answer. I urge Mr. Hillier to learn about the WSIB and, again, to make a trip down to their offices and see what they do. They don't just cut cheques for injured workers; they provide benefits to all injured or ill workers. This is only one aspect of the WSIB system in Ontario. The WSIB provides numerous benefits to both employers and employees which are not covered by third party insurers. Again, I urge you to tour the WSIB and learn about all its aspects. WSIB offers a tour, and I would be more than willing to help them set that up.

The WSIB provides a full suite of programs and services from end to end that are not available with private insurers. Employers are given prevention programs and services that save lives and prevent devastating injuries. When an injury occurs, the WSIB has many programs to get workers back to work safely and retrain workers who are more seriously injured.

Everyone knows about the WSIB's successful marketing campaigns to bring attention to the importance of workplace health and safety and prevention, not to mention the leading research that is conducted and funded by the WSIB on workplace safety, treatment and return-to-work effective practices to support workplaces and injured and ill workers.

We need to continue to work together. Mr. Hillier's proposal goes against the recognized and accepted model. Again, I urge Mr. Hillier to work with us to strengthen the relationship between employers, injured workers, labour—

Mr. Randy Hillier: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is customary and in the standing orders to refer to members by their riding name.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That is correct. The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington is correct; I would ask the honourable member to refer to other honourable members by their riding name.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Anyone familiar with why a compensation system was recommended and set up almost a century ago understands the model we have. Members of the party of Mr. Hillier, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, understand the benefits of this model. In fact, his colleague Ms. Elizabeth Witmer was the labour minister who introduced legislation that gave oversight of prevention to the WSIB. It's interesting that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington's bill ignores concepts introduced by his own caucus member, including the importance of prevention. His bill also ignores the employer support services funded by employer WSIB premiums, including access to industry health and safety associations. Right now, if an employer has a health and safety question or needs assistance on developing a workplace safety program, such as guarding a machine or addressing ergonomic issues in the workplace, they can contact their industry's health and safety association for help. Experts in health and safety can come into the workplace, answer their questions and help them improve their workplace safety record and culture.

This bill is only focused on benefits. Where are all the employers who rely on these important services going to get access to them? This bill also ignores the relationships that employers, injured workers and labour have. More importantly, this bill ignores the support these groups have for the current structure and ignores the time dedicated by employers, labour, injured workers and their advocates to work with the WSIB. It ignores the time dedicated by employers and labour officials who sit on the health and safety associations to improve industry safe practices.

Again, is the WSIB perfect? No. Is the WSIB working to improve? Absolutely. The users of the WSIB I talked to are committed to seeing the current model work. They are not interested in bringing third party insurers into the mix.

1510

I want now to talk about the unfunded liability. This is the difference between the assets currently held by the WSIB and the amount needed in the future to cover all current claims. This bill does not address the responsibility on employers opting out of the UFL. There are always concerns when the UFL increases. However, employers have never shied away from their responsibility to pay down the UFL. They expect the WSIB to spend their premiums responsibly and offer a fair system for both employers and injured workers.

What the member is proposing is an unfair system allowing some employers to find a third party insurer to cover them and leave the UFL to the ones who can't get private coverage to deal with. The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington is not only talking about turning back the clock; he's talking about moving us back to the past, before we had a workplace compensation system. The solution to the concerns about the UFL is not to allow a few to walk away but to work together to address it.

Everyone understands that the economic downturn has caused the WSIB's investment portfolio to be severely impacted. The WSIB was no different than any other investor, be it individuals with RRSPs or institutional investors like pension funds. The WSIB has been working hard to develop initiatives to reduce and, ultimately, retire the UFL in a responsible manner. The chair of the WSIB has met with over 50 stakeholder groups to hear from them on how best to address the UFL.

The founding principles of a workers' compensation plan is a fair program for both injured workers and employers. Mr. Hillier's proposal is deficient in countless areas, including that it goes against the founding principle—

Mr. Randy Hillier: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Once again, it is customary and our protocol to address the members by their riding name.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Let's not be too frivolous on our points of order.

The member for Brampton West has the floor.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I urge the member to meet with injured workers to hear their stories. It's not fair to injured workers to be faced with having to deal with different insurance providers with different rules, different filing requirements, different benefits, different services than the WSIB. I know that business would be concerned about the differences too.

The proposed bill does not say that the alternate plan has to provide the same benefits as the WSIB. No, it says it must be only "comparable" and, more importantly, only comparable with the WSIB on the date when this proposed bill would come into force. The bill ignores the Legislature's right to amend legislation; instead, it would freeze benefit coverage. Secondly, "comparable" in any dictionary is not "equal." This should make everyone very uneasy.

This member is proposing that a vast amount of time and resources of employers and injured workers be dedicated to litigating whether benefits are comparable to the WSIB. That's the last thing that anyone should want. Instead, the focus should be on improving a system that everyone is familiar with: the WSIB. Everyone knows of the benefit coverage offered by the WSIB and the procedures to apply. While some may dispute the entitlements provided or the procedures, the bottom line is that there is a familiarity with this process. That would not be the case if this member's bill is passed into law. Let's work together to improve the system, not complicate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to make a few comments on Bill 219, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, to provide employers with the right to participate in alternate insurance plans.

It's interesting to talk about this bill; it's such an interesting bill. A lot of my constituents are still here, and they may stay for the weekend to see question period now on Monday morning, which is even more interesting when you're allowed to stay here.

What I find interesting about this bill is that it's an alternative. But I think what matters more than anything is the fact that this bill is on Hansard, and the comments coming from the people who oppose this bill, as well as those who support the bill, will be documented. Why I say that is because I think it's worth the discussion in this House to have changes to the WSIB or improvements to it. We keep hearing, and the member from Brampton West just kept saying, "We'll work with you. Let's work together. Let's make it a better system." There are many ways you can do that.

I can tell you, as a former small business person and still part owner in a small company, and the number of my constituents I talk to, that there are still a lot of problems out there, both from the position of the employer and the employee. I don't know how many of the members in this House work with WSIB claims, where the constituent comes back to you and asks how you can help them with an injury they've had because they've run into problems with the WSIB. But when I see them walk through the door, usually there's a file an inch and a half thick with paper, and it's just a nightmare what they've been through, trying to get a satisfactory agreement or satisfactory claims from the WSIB. I get that on a fairly consistent basis, and when I see that—I mean, some people with WSIB obviously try to abuse the system. We've known that. That's been a fact for many, many decades. But there are other people that are very legitimate. They've had injuries and they're having difficulty getting fair compensation for their injuries. In my opinion, anyhow, it seems as though they're being put through the loops like you would not believe.

On the other hand, I'm also having WSIB inspectors from the Ministry of Labour going into some of our plants, and you know, we've lost a tremendous number of manufacturing plants in Ontario, particularly under your government. I believe there are 300,000 lost manufacturing jobs. So do you know what? I think they've got a lot of inspectors out there and they're looking for a plant that's actually operating. What they do is go into these plants and make life miserable and intimidate, and in a lot of cases they intimidate the owners. I don't want to put the names on the record here in the House today because I'm afraid of retaliation from WSIB inspectors to those particular plants. But I can tell you of examples where people have bent over backwards to satisfy the needs and requirements of the WSIB, only to be brought

in six months later or five months later—a new inspector could change everything—shutting plants down.

One particular plant was a concrete company. They're about to spend $30 million on a new plant. The guy phoned me in a rage, almost in a heart attack stage, because his plant had been shut down for the weekend. It cost him $25,000, and he had been given approval just six months earlier that the plant was fine. Those are the kinds of stories we're hearing.

If the member from Brampton West and the Ministry of Labour are serious, I'm sure they'll listen to this debate here today that shows that maybe we do need some alternatives. We did take the alternatives away from small business people with Bill 119, and that cost every small builder, every home builder, every small contractor another $11,000 a year in WSIB costs. That's what it worked out to be. We opposed that at the time and we're still opposed to that today. It's actually part of our small business platform that we revisit that, because it intimidates small business people. It makes it more difficult to do business.

On the other side, people are going to have no money anyway. You're taxing them to death. Look at the harmonized sales tax. That's hitting everybody, hitting the consumer at the front end, on every topic you can imagine and everything they go to purchase. There will be less money anyhow, and of course those workers will be driven underground and everybody will be working for cash under the table. That's what will happen. No one believes that over there. But if you proceed with the harmonized sales tax, that's exactly what's going to happen in the province of Ontario.

I think, although you seem adamantly opposed to this bill, it is an alternative and it is an opportunity for people in the province to have this debate. I'd actually like to see the House pass this bill, move it on to committee and have debate. Vote it down at committee. Vote it down in third reading. But if you're sincere about the legislation, let's have an opportunity to debate the bill and then vote it down if it's so bad.

1520

That's all I need to say today. I appreciate the fact that so many of my constituents have hung around from north Simcoe and Simcoe county, Tiny township in the county of Simcoe. I hope you are enjoying democracy in action here, even though we do have a harmonized sales tax coming in on Canada Day next year, and happy Canada Day then.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I certainly want to start by commending the debate. I think that part is important, to make sure that we pay attention to the choices we make in business today. It's good to back off a little bit here.

The government has actually moved a couple of bills in the last six years that are sort of anti-business. If you read the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, one of the top three issues over the last five years has been red tape and government bureaucracy.

One of the glaring examples in one of their most recent reports from a very independent, arm's-length agency—I think it was Judith Andrews who was the policy crafter of the comment—was that, actually, WSIB, in its intent, is the right thing: to make sure that workers are protected and insured in the workplace. That's not in dispute here. The question of how that's delivered is what's at dispute.

What they said in the report, basically, was that WSIB premiums are a tax on jobs; ultimately, they are a tax on jobs, and you would know that. Whether it's 5% of payroll or 12% of payroll, it's a tax on jobs.

I guess it's what you pay for. But what they did in Bill 19 is a classic example of how they slipped their hand into your other pocket and took out some more money, with no service.

Let's take a small example of a roofing company—one of the highest rates. I think over 10% of payroll is the premium—one of the highest rates. What they did in Bill 119 is they required that the investors, the managers, the accountants, the clerks, the people who would be working in the sales office, all of them, would now be paying the 10% to 15% premium, even though they never climb a ladder and they never pick up a hammer. The most exposure to risk would be answering the phone and having two phones.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Northumberland has an opportunity to respond. He was in the racetrack business, and he's been going around in circles for years. We'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: And you haven't caught up yet, John.

Mr. John O'Toole: Just a moment. I take umbrage with that. We can settle that outside; we'll have a race with our cars or something. My point is this: He's distracting us from the real importance; it was a tax on payroll, is the point I'm making.

Bill 119 got small business thinking. And the member from Simcoe North mentioned that he was a business person. Mr. Hillier was a business person as well. As a tradesperson—both were tradespersons—they were on the tools. They know of what they speak.

In my role at General Motors, I worked in the employment area. I was actually involved in personnel for a number of years, and part of that responsibility was what they called early-return-to work policy, which means that when workers were injured, you had to offer them light duty.

Early return is a very important option so that they don't become habitual with medications for pain and those various things, and you were required to offer them light duty. Those are the kinds of options that they should be looking at.

But what we are talking about today here, more importantly, is this sort of father-knows-best attitude that there is one solution for every workplace. That simply is not how it works. There are a lot of contract workers today who are shut out of this business.

If you really want to do the right thing, give people choices that suit the workplace, whether it's a unionized workplace, a self-employed workplace or a small business where it's a husband and wife, their children. These are the kinds of things that I think are important. But what is not accessible to this McGuinty government is the one-size-fits-all, whether it's in forestry or whether it's in manufacturing.

Why is the WSIB in trouble? There are 300,000 manufacturing jobs gone—you might suggest because of red tape. When they're gone, the payrolls are gone; the revenue's down. So WSIB now is short revenue. In fact, they have a deficit of $15 billion, so what that signals to me is more tax in the future. The tax would be called a premium in this case, upping the rates on the remaining few workers. Who are we competing with in the global economy? We're competing with countries that are dealing with having a job as the most important thing and having choice to make sure you're covered while at the workplace. That can be done with what Mr. Hillier's talking about.

If you have car insurance or home insurance, there is a provision there for personal accident, and that's insurance. It's seven days a week, 24 hours a day. If you have WSIB today—and we deal with it in our office—if you fall off a ladder at work, they're going to dispute that you weren't at work; you were at home when you did it. So you spend more time in court appealing it than getting paid for the insurance that you paid for. It is insufficient, in my view, and I think this is one option that could be explored.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I believe the government side has 19 seconds left. The honourable member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is a proposal that no other province in Canada will touch. This is a proposal that New Zealand did try; it was a disaster. They reverted back to the old way. This is a philosophy not so much of back to the future, but indeed ahead to the past.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Mr. Hillier, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank my colleagues from Simcoe and from Durham, and also the member from High Park.

As the member from Brampton West was talking, he reminded me of an old adage we used to have on the job site. It went like this: "A little hard work never hurt anyone, but why take the chance?" Right? Why take the chance? What's clear from the Liberal side is that choices and options are terrible for them. I guess that's because they don't have any choice or option as well. Their Premier, Mr. McGuinty, says, "You're going to vote this way. You have no choice. You have no option," and they certainly don't want anybody else to have a choice or option when they don't.

I would like to say also to the member from High Park that this bill allows for no-fault insurance, so there would not be those court cases. That's an important consideration, one that I've included in the bill, that we continue with the no-fault insurance.

I will say to everyone here that earlier this year I had a case of a lady named Cheryl Hamill from Smiths Falls. Her 18-year-old son, a year and a half ago, was injured by a backhoe. It took a year and a half of lobbying and fighting with the WSIB by my office to get them to pay and take care of Cheryl's son, who is now nearly 20 years of age: a year and a half. It's unacceptable. But it's going to continue as long as members on the opposite side sit on their hands and choose to do nothing. If you want to work together, pass this bill. We'll take it into committee, we'll hear from people, and we'll come together with good, sensible, reasonable solutions that will help our employers, but, more importantly, help our employees and workers as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for this ballot item has expired. For those watching, we will vote on this item in about 50 minutes.

1530

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE AND ELDERLY PEOPLE FROM ABUSE ACT (POWERS OF ATTORNEY), 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES ET DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES CONTRE LES MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS (PROCURATIONS)

Mr. O'Toole moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 with respect to powers of attorney / Projet de loi 188, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur la prise de décisions au nom d'autrui en ce qui a trait aux procurations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. John O'Toole: There will be other members speaking.

I think this purpose today is very important to understand. The purpose of Bill 188 is really primarily beginning the long and important debate on a population that's aging, as well as making sure that there are protections in place.

I want to take, at the very outset, a few moments and thank the people who have really educated me or at least brought to me an important issue that they were working on and asked me to be their legislative partner. That would be Tammy Rankin, who is from the Durham Elder Abuse Network. Thank you for spending your time here today listening to some of an important conversation. I would put to you that this is the most important. Thank you very much. I'd like to also thank Sergeant Phil Lillie, who is from the Durham regional police, and his partner,

Sergeant John Keating, the other Durham regional police officer who's worked on this elder abuse strategy. I thank them for the work they do.

This is but one very, very small piece of an attempt to put some strength behind a document that's often referred to as the Substitute Decisions Act—the power-of-attorney kit. Those power-of-attorney kits are available online, basically at most provincial offices; certainly any of the MPP offices would have them. They offer individuals, without going directly to a lawyer—it doesn't mean you should not go to a lawyer. It's a form that has been drafted and that actually came out of legislation back in about 1992, amending the Substitute Decisions Act. And that's what my bill does, is attempt to work with the existing document and simply strengthen it.

In the strengthening of it, I think that I first heard from victims in my own riding of Durham and then from the work done by Ms. Rankin, as well as Sergeant Keating. Other abuse issues that were reported in the media—I'm sure members here would have seen in the media occasions when often, not even outside of their family, elders were abused or taken advantage of. We'll put it that way, in a less formal way.

I don't want to leave the impression that this is interfering legislation or mandatory compliance legislation. What it's offering—first of all, we should all be attempting to educate ourselves, and I can certainly speak for myself in these circumstances—by listening to our constituents and listening to those situations where people have been taken advantage of.

I also worked with other groups. I've spoken at some length with the Ontario Bar Association. I've actually had correspondence with and talked to, through my office, Judith Wahl from the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, as well as the Canadian Snowbird Association and other groups.

And I'm happy today that Ms. Elliott, the member from Whitby–Oshawa, will be speaking. She is a practising lawyer, or was a practising lawyer—perhaps both—and knows what she speaks of in the legal sense.

But I think it's important to put on the record some of the testimony of what other people have said on this and the work that's being done on the whole elder abuse strategy. It's not something we're making up; we're just trying to add some value to it.

There is an important book called Aging is Living: Myth-Breaking Stories from Long-Term Care. This published document was given out a couple of weeks ago here at Queen's Park. It's by Irene Borins Ash and Irv Ash, and photographs were taken by Dr. Irvin Rubincam. It goes through the process of aging in long-term-care facilities, and it talks in a respectable manner about the process of aging itself.

Even if you look more broadly at society, there's a whole stigma of ageism itself. Even in the recruitment issue and personnel issue, it's a very important but subtle thing that we must legislate against—discrimination based on age.

The foreword of this book that I referred to is by the Honourable David Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and it says about the author, "She told the stories and showed the lined faces of Canada's seniors. Some, like Jean Vanier, David Suzuki, and the late June Callwood, were household names, while others were known and loved only in their households. To this admittedly biased eye, her subjects, whether famous or everyday Canadians, had in common the serene beauty of lives well lived and enjoyed." And it's our job to ensure this happiness and protect the elderly from abuse.

But it's not a presumptive position to start with, and I think that's important. What I mean is that there are many forms and degrees and timetables within the process of aging. Each one of us, in a different way, will go through this. But I think that families have a collective, community type of responsibility to look after one another, and that community can be within your family or external to it.

What my bill actually does is quite simple: It sets up so that the power-of-attorney kit you can pick up has a verifiable witness for that. It can't be someone who would be in a conflict. It also sets out that the person who is appointed as power of attorney would then be on a registry in the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, so that that maintained record, similar to a will today—there's no registry of wills either. The registry is something that was actually mentioned in the Fram report years ago, and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee did not want to follow suit with it; they found it a bit bureaucratic. But I think there's a way, with computers and systems today, to make sure that registry occurs. Leave it to the onus of perhaps the family lawyer, depending on how much the assets and need to organize these things exists.

It's not to imply that people who are aged are incompetent or incapable in any way; I think that all reasonable people should make provision for the future. We don't need to have a court-appointed guardian automatically in all cases, but that's what would happen, failing that substitute decision-makers were set up and things that were untoward happened.

Articles have been issued, and many capable and competent people have issued papers on it. I'm just going to refer to one of the e-mails sent to me the other day, from Judith Wahl of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly: "We do a lot of work in respect to abuse of POAs of both types and have represented a number of people in court (the grantors of the POAs) in recovering assets or regaining control over their own decision-making...." So there are advocates out there who do that work, and they've made that clear to me, as have Ms. Rankin as well as Detective Keating.

On that, I've had a case within my riding where a family was unable to find who had the power of attorney. The family had become estranged for a variety of reasons—it's hard to say this here, because this is a constituent whom I respect and would not disclose. It's up to them to tell that story. That gives air to this whole thing.

At the end of the day, I would encourage members to support it, in the respect that there would be hearings and

stakeholders, and knowledgeable advocates would come forward, including individuals and families, to make statements about what kind of framework should be set up and whether the power of attorney as we know it today is sufficient or not. I think that's really what I'm trying to achieve; it's not to be intervening in people's lives as some might suggest. I think it's really encouraging people to take those steps when they are competent and capable to set up somebody for oversight in the event of something untoward happening in their life.

I can tell you that I have testimony from the legal community, the medical community and those involved in long-term care, who have made me very distinctly aware that there is an issue here, and not something I am contriving, so this legislation would be an important part of that. But it's only one part. If you look at the document by the law commission:

"Elder abuse and exploitation

"'Elder abuse' has been recognized by governments in Canada and in jurisdictions such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States as a significant social problem requiring a legal response. The question of what form this response should take is a difficult one, and remains the subject of ongoing discussion...."

So is what we're saying today.

I'm very interested in the other members, without being too instructive, in terms of the content of the bill. The bill is online. It's available. It's printed. It's Bill 188. It requires people to register the power of attorney, it allows for disclosure of who is the power of attorney and, upon request by family members, a statement of the account expenses that may or may not have been spent or taken care of.

1540

It's a fairly simple bill, but it will contribute to the discussion on a growing phenomenon in an aging population at this time in our society. We do have a common interest, a community of interest, in doing the right thing for one another.

I would only say that, again, there are people out there in the strategy—in fact, surprisingly enough to some, the strategy on aging and elder abuse started in 2002, when we were the government. From there, today we've reached a point where there's a document that could be easily fixed with a very small piece of legislation, without adding any more expense to any family or any individual. This would just make sure it has some strength to it so that people won't abuse it—like someone coming into your house and saying, "Sign this document and I'll make sure that you get a walker or some home support." With that document they sign, when they're not as competent as they might be—they're trusting people—they may find that that person takes that information and cleans out their bank account. It could be a family member—and in many cases, the evidence says that it's often a family member—who may have a problem with substances or other kinds of issues in their life, and they find in this an easy prey.

Some of the stories I've heard are very, very sad stories, about abuse of persons who have been involved in tragic accidents and who in court received lots of money, and people have taken advantage of them. This would provide a bit more structure so that people who are fragile are not abused.

With that, I would encourage other members to participate in the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, it is an honour to rise, for a couple of reasons: first of all, to support the member's bill. I think there are some issues with it and some problems with it, but I think it's absolutely worthy to go to committee. Moreover, I think what it does is really raise the issue of elder abuse, which needs to be raised, and how we look after our seniors. In many cases, we just don't.

The issue of elder abuse is serious. It's everywhere. One in 10 is a statistic that I've heard, where seniors are abused in some way or exploited in some way. This is horrendous, and it needs to be looked at.

In my own life, when I was a United Church minister, right across the street from our church was a very notorious case, may I say. It was a typical case too: a young man living with his grandmother; he had substance abuse issues; she had aged and was no longer as mentally competent as she once was. She signed over everything to him, under false pretences. He was running a crack house out of their house. She had not been fed. She had not been looked after. The police had to intervene, and found a situation which was horrific. When they did, it was the stuff of news reports. That kind of abuse is really what should concern us all. So that's, I'd say, the personal aspect of it.

There's a kind of structural abuse that goes on too, and I want to touch on that: the sad situation in long-term-care homes and other places where, as the public who funds them, we should have some say as well. The story I've told before in this House regarding that was about a parishioner, a wonderful woman whom I'll call Mary so as not to disclose her identity. Here was a woman who had a house—again, she had some means. Her house was worth a considerable amount of money. But Mary's problem, if you can call it a problem, was that she just lived too long. She had to move from her house, sell her house, and the equity from her house went to pay for a very good nursing home, a very good long-term-care facility. I used to visit her there. It was a wonderful place—well taken care of. But the problem was, the money ran out and she didn't; she was still alive. Then they shifted her to a not-so-great nursing home, where the care was not so wonderful. Within months, she deteriorated. She was roomed with someone who had schizophrenia, who spoke out and acted out all the time. It was horrific. Her health went down, and literally within the year, she was dead. Would she have lived longer with better care? I think so; her family thought so. Unfortunately, that's where we as taxpayers and government legislators come in. So those are kinds of structural problems with seniors.

I think the member's bill is a good one in the sense that it really highlights how all of us need to take this issue seriously—and seriously for ourselves because, let's face it, we're aging too. Everyone needs a will, needless to say. Everyone needs a living will, so that if we're incapacitated, our relatives and those who love us know how to look after us. Everyone needs to have these sometimes painful discussions with our relatives and with those folks whom we trust before we get to the point where something horrendous—the member from Durham told of an instance where somebody thought they were signing off and buying a wheelchair and ended up losing their life savings. That situation is awful and should be avoided.

I'm not quite sure, to be honest, whether this bill is the total answer there. I think it's kind of amusing that somebody from the Progressive Conservative Party wants to expand a bureaucracy. It sounds like a little bit of red tape to me. It might be very difficult to administer this kind of system.

We live in an age of computerization, but we're talking about literally thousands and thousands of attorneys across the province of Ontario. If they have to report, or somebody has to report, annually on their possible charge—let's put it that way—that's a phenomenal amount of paperwork and certainly, I would say, well beyond the means currently at the public guardian and trustee's office. That's something that I as a New Democrat would have some concerns with. I'd certainly want to hear from somebody from the public guardian and trustee's office about, is this possible, could it be implemented etc.?

It's an opportunity too to say thank you to all of those who do such phenomenal work that's often unrewarded and almost always underfunded—people like my own West Toronto Support Service and others who are our safeguard right now. Meals on Wheels, strangely enough, is one of the best safeguards on our seniors who live alone, in isolation, that I have in my riding. I'm sure it is duplicated across the province. These are people who just knock on the door every day and deliver a meal, but they do far more than that, of course. They knock on the door and check on a person as well and extend their help and connect them. Those folks do phenomenal work. Thank you for doing it, because you are not getting a lot of support from here.

There are other things we could do too. We long have advocated at least a 3.5-hour per client daily minimum of care in long-term-care facilities. We're not there yet. The McGuinty government hasn't taken us there yet. Situations in some of the long-term-care homes in my riding are pretty abysmal. People speak off the record and say that even if somebody was ringing their bell or screaming out, it would take them a while to get down the hall because they've got somebody they're caring for and there's nobody else around. Simply lack of staff, lack of resources, lack of mandatory long-term-care hours, again funded by us, is something that we really need to act on, and act on quickly.

Of course, we need more affordable housing, because a lot of the problem for our seniors is exactly in the affordable housing area. We have 130,000 households now waiting for affordable housing, from seniors right down to children. The average wait is 10 to 20 years. If you're a senior waiting, 10 to 20 years is way too long.

Everyone needs a pension plan. Increasingly, fewer and fewer Ontarians have a pension plan. We're looking at a whole generation of boomers who are going to age without a pension plan, including your legislators here who have no pension plan. This is a growing phenomenon across Ontario, and it's a phenomenon that we need to look at. We need to make sure that people can age and retire in dignity. I always say to my family that I'm on the freedom 95 plan because that's about when I'll be able to afford to retire.

HST: On this side of the House we're in agreement that that's a bad thing. That's going to hurt our seniors, especially seniors living at home. They're going to be paying 8% more on basic, necessary utilities—heating. If you're on a fixed income, and a limited fixed income without a pension, as is the case with many of our seniors, dependent on CPP, let's say, you just can't afford another hit every month. You simply cannot afford it. That's what's going to be happening after July 2010.

These are all ways in which we could minimize the possibility of abuse. When seniors live economically dependent lives, when they live on someone else, they live lives more open to abuse. That's the reality. Better long-term care, better financial supports, better housing: These are all ways in which we could help prevent abuse among our seniors, and of course—yes—better wills, better systems with the naming of an attorney, better checks and balances on that system too. Again, I'm just not sure that this bill's going to fulfill all of that. But having said that, hey, at least the member from Durham is looking at the issue. At least if we get it to committee, it would be a chance to get all the long-term-care advocates here again, to get all of those members from CARP and ACE, all of those groups that do their best to look after our seniors, deputing. Maybe between us—more heads are better than one—we could actually come up with a really workable system that would protect our seniors in terms of what happens to them, whether financial, physical or emotional, when they become not as mentally competent as they were before.

1550

Thank you to the member from Durham so that we can have this conversation. There's so much more the McGuinty government could do, and easily so, quite frankly. We've been calling for this for years now, and this is at least one attempt to address the problem. Again, it's a chance to do some educational work. It's a chance for all of us to rise and say to everyone in our riding and everyone across Ontario, please make sure you have these difficult conversations now. Please make sure you have wills, and living wills, that you leave with someone. As a clergyperson in my former life, I had to do funerals all of the time. Let me tell you it just gets rid of so much

animosity and so many problems if all of this is done before.

So do it, protect yourself, and then look to your elected officials to help you do the rest. That's where we encourage people to ask their elected officials, "What have you done around the issues of long-term care? What have you done in terms of affordable housing for our seniors? What have you done to make life less expensive for someone on a fixed income and who's aging in your community?" Then, based on the answers, decide whether they're worthy of re-election or not. That's something we could all do now as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for London–Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me the chance to stand up and speak on Bill 188, Protection of Vulnerable and Elderly People from Abuse Act (Powers of Attorney), 2009. I listened to the member from Durham speaking on this bill, and of course it's a noble thing to speak about seniors and to create a way to protect seniors in Ontario. But I was shocked when I listened to him today, and compared it with what happened yesterday, when the same member stood up in his place and voted against the seniors' bill I introduced to allow seniors to drive in Ontario—to create a special driver's licence for seniors to drive in this province. He and his caucus voted against it.

But we're not going to treat them in the same way, in the same fashion, because I believe the seniors in this province worked very hard to build this province for us to enjoy today. I think we owe them all the respect and obligation to support them and create whatever way to protect them from any abuse.

I read the bill many different times, went to the research department at our caucus and got a lot of information to see the intent of this bill. I listened also to the member from Parkdale–High Park, and she has a legitimate concern about what this is going to do for seniors.

I read my research and it says, to me, that the attorney, continued under the power of agreement, has to provide all the bank income tax returns and income records on an annual basis. Also, the attorney has to provide to the public guardian and trustee the information about his or her living address on a regular basis and what they do on a regular basis. Also, as part of the system we have at the present time, the public guardian will register the attorney and all the information around the subject. I'm not a lawyer by trade, but I did my best to read it many different times to understand the technicalities of this issue because there are a lot of technical elements in this bill.

The most important thing is that all the information cannot be released by the attorney or by the public guardian and trustee without a court order. All the information would be protected. First, the guardian and trustee will register the information about the attorney, and this information cannot be released without a court order to the authorized persons who are permitted in this agreement to have the information released.

I also learned something very important. If we want to have mandatory registrations, as the member for Parkdale–High Park said, we're going to create a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of paperwork. It's not going to change anything or any meaning of the abuse. If a person wants to abuse someone else, they will create many different ways to abuse them.

The most important thing is that we have to create an initiative, a mechanism, to allow our seniors to live with respect and dignity; to create affordable homes for them; to create a national pension plan for all of the seniors across Ontario. Financial issues are important for all of us, to give us the freedom and the respect we are looking for, and also to give us the ability, as seniors, to buy and provide ourselves with good service.

It's important to have a government look after seniors. Our government played a pivotal role in this area by creating a hotline for nurses or anyone working with seniors to phone and notify about the abuser.

Also, we created almost $500 in taxes returned to seniors who want to continue living in their homes.

We also created the aging at home strategy, which plays a pivotal role in our communities to allow many seniors across Ontario to live in their homes. They proudly want to continue to live in their homes, and may need some kind of assistance, whether medical, physical, or other kinds of assistance. Our government is trying to provide services for those people.

There is also our affordable homes strategy, a part of our budget: We are going to build more than 4,500 affordable homes across Ontario, we're going to refurbish 50,000 homes, and we'll bring that number up to 76,000.

Maybe the member opposite is saying it's a small number. Yes, but this will cost us $1.2 billion. I think we are going in the right direction, building affordable homes for seniors, for the vulnerable people who live among us.

I thank the member from Durham. He brought up a very important issue, a noble issue: our seniors. As I mentioned, we owe them respect because they worked for us in the past to create a beautiful environment, a beautiful province, and to give us the chance to live in peace and tranquility, to enjoy the democracy which we all enjoy today, and to give us a chance to be here, to talk to all the people and to represent the people of Ontario. Therefore, in return, we owe them respect. We owe them all that we can, in order to provide them with the service and protection they need.

I'm not sure that this bill is going to change anything. As a matter of fact, it will create more bureaucracy, more paperwork, and it's not going to touch the main issues. The main issues are tangible issues: to allow seniors to unlock their pensions by at least 50%, which is what we did; and also to give them the chance to benefit from the environment which we should create for them to enjoy

and live in, in peace and tranquility, at the end of their lives.

My colleague is a lawyer. He understands technicalities in the laws, and terminology, and can explain more about why we are not supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm really pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to rise in support and speak in favour of the bill that's being brought forward by my good friend and colleague the member from Durham.

Bill 188 is called An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, but its short title, the Protection of Vulnerable and Elderly People from Abuse Act, I believe, really encapsulates the purpose and intent of this bill. I commend the member from Durham for bringing forward this somewhat difficult subject.

There have been some articles in the newspaper and in other media recently about elder abuse, but I truly don't believe that members of the general public understand the extent to which the financial abuse of vulnerable and elderly people takes place on a daily basis in Ontario. I would like to speak to that for a few minutes, to explain why I support the bill in the manner that it has been written and in the form which it takes.

Before I was elected, I was a lawyer practising in my hometown of Whitby, which is now part of my riding. As a general practitioner, I routinely met with members of the public who wished to prepare wills and powers of attorney, both financial powers of attorney and powers of attorney for personal care.

As many people know, financial power of attorney for property is one in which the grantor, the person giving the power of attorney, can give to their attorney the ability to make any type of financial transaction possible and to deal with their property in any way possible, except that an attorney can't make a will for the grantor.

Theoretically, that gives the attorney the ability to do whatever they want to do with a person's property: to buy and sell property, to rent property, to give it away, to do whatever they want with it.

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Now, in most cases, powers of attorney are drafted such that they do not become effective unless and until a person becomes mentally incapable. Sometimes you can have them which become immediately effective, but the general intent is they don't become effective until the person becomes mentally incapable. That's okay for the vast majority of these types of documents, because often people name family members, sons and daughters and so on. They are responsible and they do take care of that property. But in some cases—and I think this is what this bill is meant to deal with—there are people who will entice elderly or vulnerable people to sign a power of attorney in their favour and then they take all their money and run.

In some other cases, there are situations where powers of attorney are drafted, maybe given to a family member, and the family member will then transfer the property into their own name, whether the person is mentally capable or not capable. Sometimes people rationalize it by saying, "Well, it doesn't really matter because it's all going to come to me in the end anyway." That's not the point, with all due respect, because when you're acting as an attorney for property or for personal care, you are acting in a position of trust. You're a trustee, you're acting in a fiduciary position with respect to that person's property, and you have no right to transfer that into your own name or use it for your own purposes.

I can tell you that in my own practice—and I believe most lawyers do this when they are drafting power-of-attorney documents—you need to speak to the person to find out about relationships. You especially want to ask questions if someone's giving a power of attorney to someone who might not be one of their closest relatives or somebody they are close to; you need to question that sort of thing. You might also want to ask questions in situations where the grantor might appear confused or a little bit uncertain. You need to ask serious questions of them: Do they really know what they're getting into by giving a power of attorney to a certain person?

I can also say I've had several occasions in my own practice where I've had to ask for doctors' notes to confirm the mental capacity of the grantor, and in other cases I've had to say, "I'm sorry. I can't do this document for you because, in all good conscience, I feel that there's something wrong," that people are being taking advantage of and that they are being abused. There's very little that I can do to safeguard that except, of course, report criminal behaviour if I suspect it. But short of that, there's not much you can do, because the person can then simply walk down the street, go and see another lawyer, or do a document with one of the power-of-attorney kits that are so readily available.

That's why I'm so supportive of this bill. I think it does put in some safeguards that won't completely prohibit this kind of behaviour, but I would submit would go a long way towards getting people to think twice about engaging in this kind type of behaviour.

What this bill does is, first of all, require someone other than a family member to be one of two witnesses to the granting of a power of attorney. I think that's important because that can cut down on potential abuse.

There's also the requirement for the accounting with respect to what's happening to the money and the amount of compensation that the attorney is claiming. That might be something we should be discussing in committee, how extensive that needs to be, because we don't want it to become unduly bureaucratic, but we do want to reduce the amount of abuse that's happening.

The third thing this bill does, and I very much support this, is a central registry for power-of-attorney documents to be administered by the public guardian and trustee. If someone's name is going to be indicated on a public registry and they may be required to submit an annual accounting of what they've done with somebody else's

money, I think that's going to really make people think twice about engaging in behaviour that may in some cases be criminal behaviour.

Is this a perfect answer? Perhaps not. Is it the total answer? Perhaps not. But I think there are some really good ideas here that need to come forward, and I really commend the member from Durham for bringing this forward. I think it's a positive step. I can only reiterate what the member from Parkdale–High Park said: It's important that people prepare wills and powers of attorney. I can't tell you how many families I've seen split apart over these kinds of issues about improper use of a power-of-attorney document, because sometimes there's no money left to go into an estate if a power-of-attorney document has been improperly used. Then you get into fighting after the fact about estates, and there's nothing worse than that. You don't want to see that happen to families.

So I would urge all members of this House to support this bill. I think it goes a long way in protecting vulnerable and elderly citizens in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to speak to this. First, I want to commend the noble intention with which the member for Durham has brought this bill forward. He knows and I know that he does have the best interests, particularly of seniors, in mind when he brought this legislation forward.

I had the opportunity of serving for a number of years as the president of the Alzheimer Society of Toronto, then for a number of years as the president of the Alzheimer Society of Canada, and then for a couple of years on the board of Alzheimer's Disease International out of London, England.

This subject that the member from Durham has raised in Bill 188 is one that has been much discussed over the years. I want to address my remarks to one aspect of the bill, and that has to do with the registry. As I understand Bill 188, a person who wants to give someone power of attorney can do that. Of course, they do that when they're of full capacity, if you will, so they know exactly what they're doing and there aren't any issues that they didn't realize they were signing a power of attorney or their judgment was in some way clouded, in any event. So we're dealing with a person who has taken the thoughtful and rational decision to give someone power of attorney.

Bill 188 would require that the person who gets the power of attorney be registered in some department in the government, so that really all the world—anybody who wanted to know—could find out if that person has done a power of attorney, and if so, whom they have given the power of attorney to.

The subject of this idea of having a registry of powers of attorney has been debated over the years. In fact, when the Substitute Decisions Act came forward in the early 1990s, it was a subject of great debate there. I have done some research, and my research confirms what I know to be the case, because I was involved in that debate. There was very, very strong and very, very vocal opposition to the idea of maintaining a registry.

What was the basis of that opposition at the time? Is that opposition still out there in the community, and what was the basis of the opposition?

I remember the debates at the time; I remember the position of a number of stakeholders over the years. The idea was, in a strange sort of way, telling someone that if you want to give a power of attorney, you can do that, because you're fully compos and so on, but you're going to have to disclose that to the government through a registry, to the public.

There were many, many people who wanted to give a power of attorney and who were planning on giving a power of attorney.

My mother, for instance, when she was well, said that she had given a power of attorney and she confided in the person to whom she had given the power of attorney. But in her older years, she wanted to have the dignity of keeping that decision of hers to grant a power of attorney, and to whom she granted the power of attorney—she wanted to keep that private. She didn't want her friends to know and she didn't want her family members to know. It was a private, personal act between a decision that she had taken and getting the okay, if you will, of the person to whom she had granted the power of attorney. I remember she took great pride, in one of the last acts of her life before she became too ill, to grant a power of attorney.

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Telling people, particularly elderly people, in their declining years that, yes, you can do a power of attorney but somehow the government's going to get involved in it and you're going to be forced to disclose publicly who your power of attorney is and really what the terms of the power of attorney are, is in some ways disrespectful. That may be too strong a word, but I think members of the chamber know what I'm getting at.

The last point I want to make on this is the administrative complication of maintaining a registry. The research that I've done tells me that there are probably—and we don't know, but the best estimates are that there are a couple of hundred thousand or more, maybe half a million, powers of attorney in existence here in Ontario. Now, that's an anecdotal piece of evidence, but that's the sense. And to maintain an up-to-date registry and all that's involved in maintaining a registry of that size is really an administrative nightmare.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly very pleased to join the debate on this very important piece of legislation which has been introduced today by my colleague the member for Durham. This is an important private member's bill that he has put forward today. It does speak to the issue that, regrettably, we hear more and more about, and that is the issue of elder abuse.

This bill is entitled An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 with respect to powers of attorney. What it would do is protect elders from abuse. As I said, it is an issue that we continue to hear about, and as the number of seniors in the province of Ontario increases, we need to ensure that they are protected from this form of abuse, which is financial abuse.

The bill is amending sections that would ensure and codify the protection of seniors from abuse via a power of attorney, and it calls for an annual accounting of information to the public guardian and trustee as well as the creation of a registry of attorneys at the PGT office.

Now, I want to compliment and I want to congratulate the member from Durham. He has been a very hard-working member of this Legislature since he was first elected, and he has always brought forward the concerns of the constituents that he represents. As he mentioned, he has certainly become aware of the problems currently with the Substitute Decisions Act, and so this would allow for this bill, when it's passed, which I hope it will be, to go out for committee hearings. Obviously, there are concerns that we've heard that some members have, but let's give the public the opportunity to speak to the bill, and at the end of the day, hopefully we will come out with a piece of legislation which will protect our seniors, many of whom are very vulnerable, from further financial and physical abuse. So I compliment my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I, too, want to take a moment and speak a little bit to Bill 188. The reality is—the member from Kitchener–Waterloo mentioned it best—the member from Durham has brought some really positive legislation to this House in the past and works extremely hard on behalf of his constituents.

I think that when you look at the demographics of our province, the number of seniors we have in the province, and you've got a member that's caring and listening not only to the concerns of the seniors in his riding but seniors across the province, I think this legislation should move forward. I think it should move forward so that we can have the input. That's what private members' business is all about: to be able to get that opportunity to have the discussion and to have comment come back and see what good things come out of the legislation. It may or may not be perfect. Who knows; we're not sure.

But keep in mind that this is the member who started and was—he worked extremely hard over, I think, four or five different introductions of bills and debates in this House on the banning of cellphones and hand-held devices. People weren't happy, at all times, with that debate. However, he pointed out that in the end it was a public safety issue; lives would be saved. His bill, or something very similar, was finally adopted by the Minister of Transportation to bring forward, and of course he took all the credit for it, but the guy who did all the work on the bill was the member from Durham, and he did it over about five years. We all know that. I'm very proud, as a member of the PC caucus, to sit with people like the member from Durham. He works extremely hard on behalf of his constituents. He sets the bar so high for all the other members to keep up that pace, and, as a result, that's the kind of candidate that we're looking at in the next election, and that's why we'll be forming the government in 2011. So thank you very much, Minister.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate. Seeing none, the honourable member for Durham has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. John O'Toole: Again, I appreciate all the members' comments and also the unnecessary flattery. I'll certainly get copies of Hansard for the next election and give credit where credit is due.

But I think the debate is very important, and I think some very instructive comments have been made as well. The one point that I want to make is that the registry issue has come up a couple of times, and with the registry issue, I believe times have changed. The member from Willowdale had mentioned that—his only reasonable opposition to this legislation over this small administrative matter. Technology—certainly I think he's aware of that—has changed in the last 15 or 25 years to the point where there are methods to register these things on title, as we have done with property with Teranet and other solutions to the registration of title. Technology can be part of the solution.

I'm not going to stand here today in the very few moments I have and say that we'll overlook it and slip it by. The point has been established here by all the speakers: a former Minister of Health, a practising lawyer, a person who has worked in his community, as well as many competent people, I might say, in all parties, including a person who practises—telling her clergy how to behave. This is one thing that I think we can all encourage to be done.

Public hearings are what I'm asking for. It's no different than anything else. Give the stakeholders and the groups such as—I have comments here from other people who have e-mailed me even in recent days. Howard Black, who is with Minden Gross, a practising lawyer, says, "A continuing power of attorney for property and ... personal care are two ... important documents that every person should have ... in spite of the simplicity of the ... documents, the consequences that flow from them can be very significant and potentially ... damaging." So it would be instructive to follow the advice, to move along, even if the government embraces this move. In the strategy of aging at home by the Ministry of Health, they should grasp this and protect people who are no longer being protected in the institutional care of long-term care. So it's the right thing to do. I'd encourage members to vote for it, and we'll get it to committee. When it's in committee, the experts will tell us how to get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has now expired.

WASTE DISPOSAL SITE 41 IN THE TOWNSHIP OF TINY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE LIEU 41 D'ÉLIMINATION DE DÉCHETS DANS LE CANTON DE TINY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item 46, standing in the name of Mr. Dunlop.

Mr. Dunlop has moved second reading of Bill 32, An Act to prevent the disposal of waste at Site 41 in the Township of Tiny. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will vote on this ballot item after dealing with the next two. We'll call in the members at that time.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (ALTERNATE INSURANCE PLANS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (RÉGIMES D'ASSURANCE CONCURRENTS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item 47.

Mr. Hillier has moved second reading of Bill 219, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to provide employers with the right to participate in alternate insurance plans. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will call in the members after we deal with the next ballot item.

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE AND ELDERLY PEOPLE FROM ABUSE ACT (POWERS OF ATTORNEY), 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES ET DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES CONTRE LES MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS (PROCURATIONS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 48.

Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 188, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 with respect to powers of attorney. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1620 to 1625.

WASTE DISPOSAL SITE 41 IN THE TOWNSHIP OF TINY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE LIEU 41 D'ÉLIMINATION DE DÉCHETS DANS LE CANTON DE TINY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 46.

Mr. Dunlop has moved second reading of Bill 32. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hampton, Howard	Prue, Michael
Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Ruprecht, Tony
Balkissoon, Bas	Hillier, Randy	Sandals, Liz
Best, Margarett	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Sergio, Mario
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Marchese, Rosario	Sterling, Norman W.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dunlop, Garfield	Moridi, Reza	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	O'Toole, John	
Fonseca, Peter	Orazietti, David	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Pendergast, Leeanna	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 40; the nays are 11.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The honourable member from Simcoe North, which committee?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Justice policy, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the justice policy committee? Agreed. So ordered.

Please open the doors for 30 seconds. Then we'll deal with our next vote.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (ALTERNATE INSURANCE PLANS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (RÉGIMES D'ASSURANCE CONCURRENTS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 47.

Mr. Hillier has moved second reading of Bill 219. All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Dunlop, Garfield	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Sterling, Norman W.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Prue, Michael
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Hampton, Howard	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margarett	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Bisson, Gilles	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Marchese, Rosario	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Moridi, Reza	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Orazietti, David	Zimmer, David
DiNovo, Cheri	Pendergast, Leeanna	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 9; the nays are 41.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Let's open the doors for 30 seconds.

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE AND ELDERLY PEOPLE FROM ABUSE ACT (POWERS OF ATTORNEY), 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES ET DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES CONTRE LES MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS (PROCURATIONS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 48.

Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 188. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia
Arnott, Ted	Hillier, Randy	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	Jaczek, Helena	Orazietti, David
Bradley, James J.	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
Brown, Michael A.	Klees, Frank	Ruprecht, Tony
DiNovo, Cheri	Leal, Jeff	Savoline, Joyce
Dunlop, Garfield	Levac, Dave	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Rinaldi, Lou
Best, Margarett	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Moridi, Reza	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Pendergast, Leeanna	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Phillips, Gerry	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 27; the nays are 27.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Chair will vote in favour of the bill.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I just want to explain my vote. It is parliamentary tradition that we vote, where possible, to continue the debate on the bill. So I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. O'Toole?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes. The purpose, where perhaps I was exuberant there, of the vote—it's very exciting. The purpose for me—

Interjection: Which committee would you like?

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yes. I'm overwhelmed. Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy? So ordered.

We have concluded the time for private members' public business.

Before I call orders of the day, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr. Ruprecht assumes ballot item number 52 and Mr. Sorbara assumes ballot item number 70.

Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for time allocation of Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000, and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today we're talking about time allocation for the bill to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act. I have to say that I was quite surprised, quite taken aback, when the government introduced a time allocation resolution on this bill because, in fact, I thought debate was moving forward and I thought debate would come to an end in a reasonable amount of time; that there would be an opportunity to advertise for public input to committee hearings; that in fact there would be a process that would ensure that the public had their say, had their input into this bill. But to my surprise and to my shock, this bill is being time-allocated.

The reality about this bill is that the government of Dalton McGuinty has decided that rather than taking the action that's necessary to protect the public, rather than taking the action that's necessary to provide regulation through the proper ministerial channels, the government of this province has decided to turn over that authority to private regulators, to the industries themselves. Rather than turn its back on the legacy of Mike Harris—a legacy that in the election of 2003 they attacked quite vigorously—they have decided to be the children of Mike Harris and carry forward his legislative agenda and make sure that it rules in an uninterrupted way in this province.

The fact that the government has decided to bring this bill, this decision, into time allocation, is indicative of their deep commitment to the Harris legacy, one that they say they reject. The Conservative Party can speak to its support for or opposition to the Harris legacy, but the Liberal Party has made it very clear that they indeed stand for something different, or at least that's the claim that's made. It's clear from their position on the TSSA that that is not a fair or accurate depiction of their ideological direction. In many ways, I think of them as Mike Harris with a happy face, a direction that I don't think is realistically defensible.

1640

The reality is that since 2003 we have had two major propane explosions in this province, in 2004 and then in 2007. The explosion that happened in 2004—I talked about it when I had my opportunity to lead off on this bill—caused a rain of debris onto Highway 401 which could have resulted in fatalities. There was extraordinary good fortune for the people of this province that people were not injured and people were not killed. That alone should have been a very substantial wake-up call. That alone should have said to the province that there is a profound, basic, fundamental problem with the approach to regulation that was before us, and yet action was not taken.

Then in 2007 we had the explosion at Sunrise Propane. As you are well aware, Speaker, there were two deaths in that explosion, and we were extraordinarily lucky that there were only two deaths. There was the death of a man who was working on the site, who apparently had been engaged in a transfer of propane from one truck to another, a practice that is seen as dangerous and recognized as dangerous, and one that had been previously recorded on that site two years before, an event that did not result in the profound action that was required from the TSSA.

In fact, in the aftermath of that explosion, when people were asking questions about where else this threat is present, where else we have to be looking, where else we have to be taking action, the TSSA could not provide a coherent, accurate list of the propane facilities in this province. As you may well remember, the technical authority brought forward a list that was taken by reporters. Those reporters drove around the GTA—they didn't drive around the whole province; they drove around the GTA—and found mistake after mistake. The list was inadequate and inaccurate. The list did not reflect the reality on the ground.

Having seen what happened in 2004, it was clear that the McGuinty government did nothing: did not assess what was going on internally in that organization, did not assess the competence of the organization, did not think twice about the philosophy behind the set-up of that organization in the first place, and simply allowed it to continue bumbling on its way until another explosion in fact forced reality on the people of this province.

You may well be aware, Speaker, that that explosion taking place in the middle of the night was one that if it had happened during the day, if it had happened in rush hour when children were going past this facility on their way to school, if it had happened when buses and cars had been going past, could have resulted in large-scale loss of life.

What was the solution? What was the response of this government to that reality? The response of this government to that reality was not to rethink, not to go to the source, the heart of the problem, but rather to take the act that covered the TSSA and amend it in a way that allows the minister to reach in after the next explosion and stir things up and deal with the problem. That is not an adequate or suitable approach to this problem. It is not adequate; it is not suitable. For that reason alone, this time allocation bill should not be before this House, because the regulation of substances like propane and natural gas, the regulation of boilers, are questions that involve life and death, safety and injury, matters that are of great consequence to the people this province. When something goes wrong, it causes people to ask, "How could that have happened?"

I have no doubt that if in fact there wasn't time allocation on this bill, if we went through the normal process

and held committee hearings, you would hear from the people who had been victimized by Sunrise Propane. You might well hear from the people in Clarington who were victimized by the propane operation there. You would hear from workers who deal with natural gas, who have said to me, and to others who deal with the whole question of large-scale industrial investment, that they don't have confidence in the TSSA.

People who work with natural gas, with pipelines and with installations that have an extremely powerful substance under high pressure report to their union leaders in the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada that they have tremendous difficulty if they have a safety problem and they call on the TSSA. What they say is that the TSSA asks who will be paying for the inspection.

No regulator should ever be in a position where their predominant concern is how they're going to do cost recovery on the inspection of an unsafe situation.

That says to me that there's a fundamental problem with the regulatory authority. That says to me that this government should allow the full discussion of and public commentary on this bill so that the problems that are there, the problems that have been made manifestly obvious in this province, are ones that can be testified to, commented on by the public, and in turn, give the legislators an opportunity to think things through properly, make recommendations to cause this legislation to be effective and bring that back to the Legislature.

Instead, what we have is a truncated process in which we get to speak today about time allocation. The public hearings are going to happen for two hours next Wednesday, and frankly, I'm not sure that many people in the wider world are going to know that those public hearings are going to happen.

If you ask members of this Legislature, is it adequate—let's say we even pass this time allocation today, will it be adequate tomorrow to have a subcommittee meeting to discuss how we're going to inform the public, put a notice in the paper on Monday with the expectation that people will be informed and be able to get back to us to book a space on Wednesday?

Clearly that is an inadequate process of consultation for an act that is of such consequence to this province. Then the whole matter will be held over to the following week for third reading, and as I read the documentation, one hour—20 minutes per party—to talk about it.

If past history is any indication, the government will again talk about stuffing in teddy bears and not about what it is that precipitated this debate, this matter in the House: the explosion at Sunrise Propane. This matter is of too great a consequence to be rammed through the way it's being rammed through. This matter is of too great a consequence to have a bill as weak as this one before us and not give the public an opportunity to speak.

We live in a society that's very sophisticated and deals with a wide variety of powerful institutions and substances. I'll give you an example, and I was relating this the other day in committee about the cap-and-trade bill. Regulation is of consequence in our everyday lives. The financial meltdown that happened in the fall of last year happened in an environment in which governments in many parts of the world had abandoned regulation of the financial sector. That lack of regulation led to a casino-like atmosphere of speculation in financial instruments, a run-up in values that had no relationship whatsoever to the underlying fundamental economic realities, and that lack of regulation led in the United States to a near-collapse of the financial sector. That was of consequence globally.

We here in Canada have not been fabulous, but we at least—and this is contrary to the extraordinary complaints made by the banking sector in this country—have had some level of regulation that has led to our banks and our financial system being somewhat more insulated from the storm that broke over the world financial system a little over a year ago.

There was a piece that didn't get a lot of publicity, a commitment in the hundreds of millions of dollars on the part of the federal government to backstop the creditworthiness of mortgages. That was of great consequence to the financial sector, but we weren't in a situation where we had all of our banks facing a crisis of liquidity.

In that case, having regulation that was applied to companies by an external regulator whose interest was not the well-being and the profit of those companies but the well-being of the economy as a whole and the well-being of those depositors—men and women, children, seniors who depended on the banks' existence for the safeguarding of their funds—having a regulator in place that actually looked to ensure that there was adequate regulation made a difference to the financial health of Canada.

In here, we seem to think that an American-style, a Bush-style regulatory system is one that is adequate, and I have to say to you, it is not. If the people of this province were made fully aware that they have an issue before them that has to be dealt with, if they are fully aware that that explosion and the consequences of it are not going to be properly addressed, I think there would be a real outcry, but right now, it is being put slowly through the backrooms. The opportunity for public input is not there. The opportunity for real consultation and a real informing of the public has been withheld.

That's wrong. It's wrong from a procedural point of view, it's wrong from a democratic point of view and it's wrong in terms of the long-term protection of the public. On that basis, I move adjournment of this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Tabuns has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those in favour, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1654 to 1724.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Please take your seats. Mr. Tabuns, please take your seat.

Mr. Tabuns has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 8; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I find it extraordinary that we're all here, and yet I—

Laughter.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There are days when it's impressive, the response I can get from this chamber. Nonetheless I find it impressive that I have not heard a credible argument from the Liberals as to why this debate had to be shut down—

Mr. Mike Colle: You're the one who shut it down.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: May I say I have not heard a credible argument from them as to how this bill will deal with the problems of the TSSA; I have not heard them give credible argument as to why this legislation had to be rammed through without proper hearings; why third reading had to be truncated. This is a mystery to me. Why is that the Liberals, who had rejected the Harris legacy, have stood up to defend it and even now, in the dying days of this year, are doing their best to make sure that the whole system of privatized regulation continues on? It's extraordinary to me.

When we look back from likely the next tragic accident that happens because of a lack of regulatory authority, people will say, "Why is it that action wasn't taken by this Legislature, not taken by the government, to actually put in place a regulatory authority that would have the impact that has to happen?"

In the course of preparing for the debate on this matter a few weeks ago, I had an opportunity to read through the report of the special panel on propane safety, and when you looked at what's actually been done in other jurisdictions, particularly in Europe, their response to the tragedy in Seveso in Italy, it's clear that they looked at the problems before them, realized they had to have a comprehensive approach that not only dealt with regulatory authorities and oversight of dangerous substances but also looked at land use planning, the isolation of dangerous processes from the population as a whole. That isn't what's been brought before us. We don't have a comprehensive look at how to ensure the safety of the population and the safety of our cities, in fact the safety our rural areas. That is not on the table. What's on the table is another process of insulating this government from the reality of its neglecting this administration, from the reality of neglecting its responsibilities for protecting the safety of the people in this province. That's what we have.

This government lacks credibility on this issue, it lacks credibility on this process, and frankly, this government should be defending itself in the time that it has in this time allocation debate. I have yet to hear those reasoned arguments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for debate on government order number 28 has expired. The two hours is up.

Mrs. Munro has moved an amendment to the motion for time allocation of Bill 187. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This is a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1729 to 1739.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Albanese, Laura	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoskins, Eric	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Best, Margarett	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza	
Duguid, Brad	Pendergast, Leeanna	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 11; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

We'll now deal with the main motion. Ms. Smith has moved government order number 28, time allocation of Bill 187. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1742 to 1752.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Albanese, Laura	Hoskins, Eric	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou

Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margarett	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Pendergast, Leeanna	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	
Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 34; the nays are 10.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We still have time, folks, so I do call orders of the day. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly; and

That the vote on second reading be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2, 2009, for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, and following routine proceedings on Monday, December 7, 2009, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Friday, December 4, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Monday, December 7, 2009, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, December 8, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of the third reading vote allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All right, all right.

Mr. Duguid has moved government notice of motion number 144.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margarett R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
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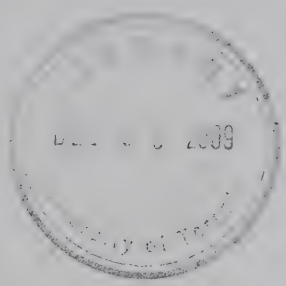
ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature



Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 23 November 2009

Lundi 23 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 23 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 23 novembre 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my great pleasure and honour to introduce Mr. Dong Jun, vice-mayor of the city of Xi'an, China, and the delegation from the city, in the members' gallery.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: On behalf of myself, MPP Reza Moridi and MPP George Smitherman, I would like to welcome representatives from the Kurdish community to the Legislature today. In the members' gallery, we welcome the president of the Kurdish Federation, Nedim Dinar; the president of the Toronto Kurdish Community Centre, Huseyin Pinarbasi; Nazan Simsek, representing the Kurdish Women's Committee; and the president of Kurdish House, Fereydoon Rahmani.

All members of the Legislature are welcome to join us for a reception in room 228-230 following question period.

Mr. John O'Toole: On behalf of my page, Maggie Hutchinson, I'd like to introduce her mother, Anne Hutchinson; father, Scot; and grandmother, Marilyn Hutchinson. They're in the west gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce Latoya Haynes, Mary Slonim and Barbara Kennedy, who are here at Queen's Park for Literacy Awareness Day.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to welcome members of the Ontario Medical Association. They're here with us today for Doctor Day. Welcome to you all.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd like to welcome back a good friend of the PC caucus, Matt Gibson, here today in the members' gallery.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'd like to acknowledge a former member, Bob Frankford.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yes, we do want to welcome Bob Frankford, who represented Scarborough East in the 35th Parliament. It's a pleasure to have you back to the Legislature today, Bob.

On behalf of the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and page Nickolas Barbieri, we'd like to welcome his mother, Anita Groman, his father, Tony Barbieri, and his sister, Jennifer Barbieri in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a visiting delegation of parliamentarians from the Imo State House of Assembly in Nigeria, led by the Honourable John Egbuchulam. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislature today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. The following words were said 10 years ago from this very seat in the Legislative Assembly: "'Public hearings'; those two words go together nicely if you believe in true democracy...." Do you know who said those words? Dalton McGuinty, as leader of the opposition. Now, as Premier of the province, trying to ram through the biggest sales tax increase in the history of the province, we hear a different tune.

Premier, after six years in office, what happened to the Dalton McGuinty we once knew?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate the opportunity. I want to begin by informing my honourable colleague that so far, outside of this House, members of the government have hosted or been involved in some 120 public consultations. We're proud of those.

In addition to that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's just on the government side—some 120 public consultation opportunities. I know that members of the opposition have also been involved in their own way, hosting these kinds of fora, and that's a good thing too.

There will be three separate opportunities to vote on this legislation. There has been tremendous opportunity—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Revenue will withdraw the comment that he just made.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, quite frankly, meetings of Liberal fundraisers and caucus meetings don't count. We're talking about going out and talking to the very tax-

payers who are going to pay that bill: the senior citizen in Belleville, Ontario, who is going to be forced to pay more for her home heating; the retired couple in London who will have to pay more for gas for their car and the attack on the mutual funds in the province.

There was once a day when Premier McGuinty, in opposition, stood for integrity, when he stood for transparency on bills, when he stood for hearing from the taxpayers who are going to have to foot this massive sales tax grab.

Premier, I'll ask you again: Will you have the courage of your convictions and hold full public hearings across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague of the position that he used to have on harmonization and corporate tax cuts, which he now rejects. At the Economic Club on April 23 of this very year he said, "To be clear, I believe that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate sets of taxes and policies and to collect two separate groups of sales taxes."

He was right then; he is wrong now. We plan to move ahead with this. We have given tremendous opportunity for the opposition, for Ontarians generally, to engage in this debate. It's an important one. We look forward to moving ahead with it to build a stronger Ontario and to create close to 600,000 more jobs.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, this is clearly not the Dalton McGuinty that people thought they elected six years ago. This is clearly not the Dalton McGuinty who used to stand at this desk and fight for public hearings and consultations across this province. And this is certainly not the Dalton McGuinty who was against the HST in 2008, and now has turned it into a massive tax grab on working families across the province.

The Premier has said, well, this will be an election issue, and I expect it will. But in opposition, Premier, you said, "Democracy isn't just something that takes place once every four years." That's what you said here. But now, as Premier, in his elite crowds, among his Liberal insiders and consultants, he refuses to meet with the seniors and working families who will pay the bill.

Premier, will you hold public hearings in London? Will you go down to Sarnia, will you go to Windsor, will you go to Kitchener, will you go to Belleville and listen to the taxpayers who have to pay this bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thought for sure the honourable member would ask us today about the just-released report from Roger Martin and his task force on competitiveness and productivity, because he asked me about that very report last year at this time. I thought he would do it again. At that time, he specifically said, "Premier, will you commit to following Dr. Martin's good advice and reduce the level of business income taxes as part of a plan to grow Ontario?"

I want to call to his attention the report released just today. It says the following: "The provincial government took a major step forward for Ontario's prosperity in improving our tax regime. By converting our provincial sales tax into a value added tax and harmonizing it with the federal goods and services tax and by reducing our corporate tax rates, the government has improved the motivations for investing in innovation and productivity.

"We have been urging this kind of reform since our first annual report, and we understand the courage required by the government to introduce these changes."

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Only Dalton McGuinty would quote from a report that is calling for an increase in the HST even before it becomes the law of the land.

Premier, you have lost touch with the senior citizen. You have lost touch with the hard-working middle-class family. You have lost touch with the students who are looking to find a good job and make their way forward. They are going to get nailed with this massive—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, why don't you go out and meet with these senior citizens? Why don't you go out and meet with these hard-working middle-class families? Why don't you go and meet with these students who are going to get nailed by your sales tax increase?

Premier, you're moving to extend this legislative sitting for an additional two weeks to go up to Christmastime if you so choose. Why don't you use that extra time to have weeks of province-wide public hearings to hear directly from the taxpayers who are going to foot this bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let's hear what else my honourable colleague has said about the HST in the past. In March of this year, he said the following: "In the manufacturing sector, the problem with the PST is it cascades, so every step along the way there's a tax on tax on tax, which raises the cost of goods and particularly punishes exporters. So we understand how [a harmonized sales tax] can help the economy." He was right then; he is wrong today.

Dr. Jack Mintz has specifically said that moving ahead with a package of tax reforms will create nearly 600,000 more jobs. At the end of the day, this is a debate about creating 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians. We're for that. They remain against that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Sadly, after six years in office, what working families are seeing is a government that is out of gas, that careens from scandal to scandal, and that has lost its sight on the ball of growing jobs in the economy. The only trick they have left is a massive new sales tax hike on middle-class families and retirees across the province of Ontario. Obviously, after six years in office, the government is growing too comfortable and arrogant in the way they conduct business in the province.

I could not believe it last week. When asked about public hearings, Dalton McGuinty said, oh, they can call talk radio. They can call Bill Carroll on CFRB; they can call Steve Madely on CFRA—as if they're running the province. Working families who are getting stuck with this bill want to say directly to the decision-makers that they cannot handle another massive sales tax increase from Dalton McGuinty.

Premier, will you hold public hearings across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to take the opportunity once again to thank Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty for their support on this very important issue, on behalf of Ontarians and, I would argue, Canadians as well.

My colleague was adamantly in favour, very much and enthusiastically in favour, of the harmonized sales tax in the past. Now he says he is not, which puts him in opposition to the federal government. It also puts him in some very strange company, I would argue. He now stands locked arm in arm with the Ontario NDP, the BC NDP and the Canada NDP. I guess it's up to my honourable colleague to choose the company that he keeps.

We're actually progressive on this side of the House. We're actually reformers on this side of the House. We're actually for doing those things, even though they might be difficult—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, I stand with the hard-working taxpayers across the province of Ontario who are firmly rejecting your massive sales tax increase.

We have asked the Premier over and over again to go out and face the very people who are going to be left footing this bill, to have public hearings across the province of Ontario.

I remind Premier McGuinty that when he used to stand for transparency, when he used to stand for integrity, when he used to stand for listening to taxpayers, he said, "'Public hearings'; those two words go together nicely if you believe in true democracy...."

But sadly, we see a Premier who has changed after six years in office, a Premier who hangs out with the elite and won't listen to hard-working taxpayers, and a Premier who has contempt for public hearings and listening to taxpayers.

Premier, I'm going to remind you of your words—but quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, if he has that kind of contempt for taxpayers, I see no point in continuing with question period today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier continues to ignore tens of thousands of everyday people who are worried about a new tax on gasoline, hydro, home heating, haircuts and much more. Why is the Premier plowing ahead with his unfair tax scheme when the House of Commons hasn't even passed legislation to make it possible?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I sense a greater intimacy with the NDP these days.

Let me just say that we are very much looking forward to moving ahead with this initiative, and I think it's important to understand it in its entirety. We're talking about reducing personal income taxes. We're talking about reducing corporate income taxes for our largest businesses. We're talking about reducing taxes for our small businesses as well. In fact, we're talking about putting in place a support package for small businesses to help them in their transition to the HST. We're talking about, in the end, creating nearly 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians.

I think that when all is said and done, there is nothing to which we attach greater value today, in the face of a global recession, than a job creation strategy. That's fundamentally what this is all about. I know that the NDP in fact support anything that we can do to create more jobs for Ontarians.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In backroom meetings, Harper Conservatives were very excited about shifting the tax burden onto everyday people. They were okay with sticking it to people who will pay 8% more to heat their homes and fill up on the way to work while businesses get a no-strings-attached tax break worth billions and billions of dollars, but now that same Harper Conservative government has seen the public anger. They're starting to scramble, to distance themselves. The Premier is at the altar, but there's no one rushing to his side. How can the Premier be so sure that the HST is actually going to get through the House of Commons when no party in Parliament wants anything to do with it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We look forward to moving ahead with this initiative because we believe it's the right thing to do. There's an important section to be found in Roger Martin's latest report, his eighth annual report, and I'd refer my colleague to page 50. It's called "Most HST myths do not stand up to scrutiny." Under the column of myths, which are rebutted in here, and I recommend it to my colleague, myths include:

"—increases prices paid by consumers;

"—is an excuse for producers and service providers to gouge consumers;

"—raises costs for small businesses;

"—hurts lower-income Ontarians;

"—is a tax grab;

"—is 'business friendly';

"—should be delayed until the recovery is under way."

Each and every one of those myths is effectively rebutted on that page and I would strongly recommend

that to my colleague, on page 50 of the latest competitiveness and productivity report.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm going to try once more to get an answer out of this Premier. There's a good reason to believe that the minority government in Ottawa may actually reject the harmonized sales tax. Conservative MPs are scrambling to distance themselves from this unfair tax, and Michael Ignatieff has more fires to put out than Smokey the Bear. His federal Liberals were asked if they were going to support the HST legislation just last week and they would not commit to it. Jack Layton's New Democrats of course have made their opposition to this tax crystal clear for all of the people here in Ontario and BC to know where we stand. If federal legislation comes crashing down on the McGuinty government, what's the Premier's plan B?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I have every confidence that the government of Canada will do everything that is necessary to give effect to the will of the people of Ontario as expressed by their duly elected government. I think that is a legitimate expectation on the part of all Ontarians, that the government of Canada will give effect to the duly expressed intent of all Ontarians through their duly elected Ontario Legislature. I think that's a pretty straightforward matter. We have a signed agreement with the government of Canada and we fully expect and anticipate that the federal government will do everything it needs to do in order to ensure that we can put our initiative into effect.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. People are asking the Premier to listen. Here's what they're saying: Jack Rankin writes, "I think it's time you listen to the folks who put you in your jobs."

Marilyn Cephan writes, "It seems to me that our provincial and federal government leaders are dictators and they like to patronize us."

The Premier's tax scheme is unfair. The federal Parliament might not even let him enact it. Isn't it time the Premier takes a step back and actually listen to the people instead of ramming this through as fast as he can?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know we've spent a lot of time talking about the HST, and that's important, but there are other aspects to our package of tax reforms that are worthy of consideration as well. I only wish that my honourable colleague would draw the public's attention to those from time to time. Those include the following: 93% of Ontarians will get a permanent personal income tax cut; 2.9 million families and individuals will get a new annual tax credit of $260 per person. That is permanent. Additionally, there are transition payments: $1,000 for the typical family and $300 for the typical individual. Taxes won't change for 83% of consumer purchases.

Those are all dimensions to our package of tax reforms that my honourable colleague has not referenced in her attacks on the HST. Having said that, this comes down to 600,000 more jobs for Ontario families. I can't think of anything more important than us coming together to stand up for those 600,000 jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe the Premier hasn't noticed, but it's the HST that the people of this province are talking about. People right across Ontario feel that their basic right to be heard is being ignored by their government. The Premier refuses to listen to their concerns about the HST; the Prime Minister denies having anything to do with this unfair tax.

Sandra Dawson of Port Dover wrote to tell me this: "Please let the Premier know that we are against the HST ... there is no listening going on ... just disrespectful and patronizing repeated attempts at convincing us of what is good for us."

Instead of telling people what to think, why won't the Premier listen to what people have to say?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The fact is, we've done a lot of listening, but there comes a point in time—and this is the responsibility of leadership—when you have to take action. The single greatest request that we've been receiving from Ontarians is to build a stronger Ontario and make sure there are more jobs.

The reports are in now that our tax package will do a number of things, including create nearly 600,000 more jobs. It will result in incomes going up by 9% more than they otherwise would have. It will result in $47 billion more being invested in our businesses than otherwise would have been the case.

These are reports that have come in to us from experts. We have listened long and hard. We now understand what we need to do to grow a stronger Ontario, and particularly to create 600,000 more jobs. It's the right plan at the right time for the right people. That's why we're moving ahead with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, what the people of this province are telling me is that they want a government that listens. Instead, they have a Premier who ignores them and a Prime Minister who avoids them.

Rick Bagshaw of Aurora writes this: "I suggest that you drop the legislation and start listening to the citizens of Ontario. Remember us; we are the ones who put you in power to lead a responsible government."

Ron Arnold of Port Rowan adds this: "Please open your eyes and ears and listen to the people before it's too late."

The tax scheme hasn't passed in the federal Parliament, and it may not. There is no need to rush this through. Will the Premier take a step back and agree to have public hearings so that he can listen to the people across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't think I need to remind my honourable colleague that in the course of this terrible global recession, we've lost over 200,000 jobs in Ontario. I think the single most pressing and urgent need

for all of us here is to find ways to strengthen our economy and to create jobs. We understand, on the basis of all the advice that we've received—and we have done a lot of listening, but at some point in time, you've got to turn the listening into leadership. You've got to take action. That's what we've been charged with here in government, and we will not shrink from that responsibility.

We have found a way. It's to be found in our package of tax reforms. It's about permanent personal income tax cuts. It's about corporate income tax cuts. It's about cuts for our small businesses. It's about putting us on a stronger, more competitive, sustainable foundation. Most importantly, it's about creating 600,000 more jobs, and it's about building a bright future for our children.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. Last December, as part of its anti-poverty strategy, the McGuinty government promised to initiate a review of our failing social assistance programs. Today, almost a year later, the government has not yet released any terms of reference for the review, it has made no indication of how it will proceed, it has made no indication of who will lead the review, and it has not said whether people living in poverty can be involved. Surely they weren't involved in the last round.

Why is the government dragging its feet while more and more people fall into poverty, and despair grows across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The member asks a very good question. Yes, indeed, we are working closely with our partners in the poverty reduction area to develop the standards for this review. I will say to you, we will be announcing soon what we will do and how we will proceed, so please keep posted and we will announce it soon.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It seems that the government is paralyzed on this. It's taking a whole year to set parameters, never mind discussions of any consequence. The government has fumbled and delayed for a full year while more and more Ontarians suffer from a perverse and hurtful social assistance system that actually traps people in poverty and in sickness by stripping people's assets to almost nothing, by forcing a single adult to try to survive on $572 a month, and by treating people as though they have committed a crime by being poor and on welfare.

When will this government finally take the action it promised, to make social assistance a hand up rather than a lifetime punishment?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would say this: I don't agree with the comment of the member of the opposite party. I think this government has been listening and has been acting to help those in poverty. At the end of this month and the beginning of December, the people on social assistance and ODSP will have seen an increase of 11% since we came into power, we have moved forward with the Ontario child benefit, which will take the children out of the social benefits area, and we have increased the minimum wage. We will be building affordable housing, and in the school area, we have invested a lot to help children—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Today at Queen's Park we are being visited by Laubach Literacy Ontario, which is a member of the Ontario Literacy Coalition. The Ontario Literacy Coalition is a group that exists so that all adults in Ontario reap the full benefit of literacy. This will be accomplished efficiently and effectively with the greatest return on investment possible. They support over 250 members, and more than 46,000 adult learners are served by the 200 adult literacy programs supported by the OLC.

While the HST was introduced to create jobs and make our economy stronger, it is important to make sure that we don't forget the fundamentals. What will the HST mean for books and other reading materials, such as newspapers, in Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question, and we want to welcome our friends today, who are great proponents of literacy in the province of Ontario. What I can share with you is that on July 1, when the HST comes into being, the provincial portion of that tax will still exempt books and newspapers. That's something that they enjoy today and it's something that they will continue to enjoy, because literacy is a fundamental building block of our economy.

Our plan is designed to help create some 600,000 more jobs in the province of Ontario, jobs that are good-paying jobs. Good-paying jobs require people to have those literacy skills that are required in the 21st century. It's why we've decided to make that exemption.

I think all Ontarians understand that the world has changed, and it is important for us to change with it so that we can prosper in the 21st century. That's why literacy is so important. It's why we've decided to put in that exemption. Despite the cost; we understand how very important it is to Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: The Ontario Literacy Coalition states that leading researchers are highlighting the connections between literacy, employment and the economy. Measures like exempting books are a step in the right direction.

No one chooses to struggle in supporting their family, and we can support Ontario families by helping people to get back to work. Income tax exemptions, tax credits and

transitional cheques will help struggling families as we move to create a more competitive system.

Targeted exemptions will greatly assist families in both the short and long terms. These exemptions include children's clothing and footwear, all infant and child care seats, diapers, feminine hygiene products and meals under $4. What will these measures mean for low-income Ontarians?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say, particularly to those citizens in our great province who are struggling with the fact that they have a low income, that we have ensured that our tax package is designed to assist them and to actually put them in a better position. Let me tell you how we're going to do that.

Yes, indeed, we are harmonizing the sales tax. We're taking that money and permanently cutting income taxes for 93% of Ontarians. We're not cutting income taxes at the top end, I say to my friend; we're actually cutting taxes on the first $37,000 of income. But for those people who are struggling without a job, they know that today they receive the GST rebate from the federal government; that's some $240, and $140 for a child. On July 1, that will be more than doubled. We'll be adding $260, tax-free, for every individual in that family, adult and child.

Our tax reform package means that some 90,000 lower-income Ontarians will not pay provincial income—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Across the province, hydro users are being hit with billions of dollars in extra charges due to something called the provincial benefit. On some hydro bills, the benefit is clearly marked; on other bills, it's completely hidden. At a time when the economy is struggling and hard-working Ontarians are about to be hit with an 8% tax surcharge on their home heating bills, why is your government hiding a hydro surtax that's costing ratepayers billions of dollars?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I appreciate the comment, and I think the public probably would appreciate this message on pricing: If you look at pricing on electricity over the last five years for both industrial and residential, it essentially is unchanged over a five-year period; I think the member probably knows that. So in terms of electricity prices: unchanged over a five-year period.

One thing I will agree with him on is that the language in the bill is frankly not as clear to the consumer as I think it should be, and I want to assure the member that our ministry and I are looking at that to find a way that would make it clear. But on electricity pricing I say again that over five years, for a variety of reasons I can get into in the supplementary, it's essentially unchanged. That's been good news for the consumers and, frankly, good news for businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, that's not what my constituents are telling me about their hydro bills. If you're actually going to be looking at this, when are you going to introduce the changes so that everyone can see how they're being hit by this hydro surcharge?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I'm sorry that is what your residents are hearing, because the fact of the matter is, that is what has happened to electricity prices. I just urge them, really, to take a good look at their bills.

Again, I am looking at this as we speak. I'm determined to find ways that the public—you know, we have retailers out there doing business with the public. I'm anxious to find a way to make our bills even more clear for the consumer. I think they have a right to understand in clear terms what they're buying and what the bill contains. I can't give you a date, which I'd love to do, but I will tell you that we will deal with this in months, not years.

But on pricing, again I say: Have the people who talked to you look at their bills closely, because over a five-year period, frankly, for a variety of reasons the price has not gone up.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Just after Thanksgiving, we heard that discussions were ongoing with regard to a policy that prevented large-scale organic turkey farming in Ontario. Organic farming is a booming area of the agriculture sector. I have many organic turkey farmers in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, and so, naturally, I was really disappointed to hear the difficulty of Ontarians in obtaining fresh, Ontario-grown organic turkeys.

I've heard that a decision has been made that will be well-received by Ontario consumers looking to purchase organic turkeys in the upcoming holiday season. Minister, could you please inform the House of the decision that has been made and the impact it will have on Ontarians who are looking to purchase Ontario organic turkeys in the holiday season?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: On the weekend, I was very delighted to learn that the Turkey Farmers of Ontario have decided why it is so very important to implement policies that will enable Ontario consumers to actually purchase Ontario organic turkeys.

Now, we're delighted that in the province of Ontario we have many wonderful agriculture sectors, and the organic sector is one of the most successful. In fact, it increases by double digits year over year, so there's a tremendous demand. Ontarians are looking for Ontario organic products. There was a challenge there. The Turkey Farmers of Ontario had regulations in place that prevented the production of organic turkeys in Ontario and they changed that. They announced they will change that, and we congratulate them for that. That's a very important move.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you, Minister. A report by the Organic Trade Association in 2008 noted that organic sales have been growing at an enormous rate of 17% to 23% each year over the past 10 years. However, traditionally organic foods in Canada have been imported. With this dramatic year-over-year increase in organic food sales, this sector presents abundant opportunities for Ontario farmers.

Minister, what is this government doing to assist Ontario farmers to transform their operations to take advantage of, how shall I say, to gobble up, this growing opportunity?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'd like to thank the honourable member for her question and for her humour in this, but this is a really important issue for turkey farmers and for all organic producers in Ontario.

As I indicated, it is a very healthy sector. We have partnered with the organic sector on a number of initiatives. During the past two years we've invested $400,000 in the Organic Council of Ontario to help identify needs and develop this sector. Some of these funds are now helping farmers transition to producing organics.

Last year we invested more than $500,000 in three new research projects for organics. OMAFRA will continue to invest in our own ministry so that we have people on staff to better support those in the organic sector who are looking for advice, support and direction as well.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. In Hamilton, the welfare caseload has risen by 2,682 households since October 2008. High unemployment and a lack of good jobs have forced thousands more families to seek help from food banks and social assistance programs in my city. Hamilton city council has put more than half a million dollars into a food voucher program for a growing number of people in need. Since it is clear that Ontario's poverty reduction strategy is leaving many Hamiltonians without enough to eat, my question is a simple one: What is the McGuinty government going to do to come up with a more permanent solution for the people who are suffering in my community?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've got good news for the people of Hamilton on a number of fronts. I had the opportunity recently to speak with the mayor of Hamilton, and I congratulated him for the support he gave us in landing the Pan Am Games. That's going to result, in the city of Hamilton alone, in a new swimming pool at McMaster University, a new stadium and a velodrome, which will be the best of its kind in northeast America.

Why is that important to the people of Hamilton? Because it means jobs, jobs and jobs. We're talking over $200 million in infrastructure investment, with a deadline. It's got to be done by 2015.

On top of that, we're going to move ahead with a package of tax reforms that will create some 591,000 more jobs. My honourable colleague knows that the HST in particular will benefit our manufacturers, and if there's a community in Ontario which is heavily dependent on manufacturing, it is the city and the people of Hamilton. That's one more reason for us to work together to move ahead with this package of tax reforms.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: One year ago there were 10,000 recipients; today there are nearly 13,000 recipients, and that number continues to climb. In December 2008, the McGuinty government promised to review social assistance rates, but nothing ever came of it. Hamilton has $16.5 million of social services bills that belong to the provincial government, not including the cost of the emergency food measures they're taking right now. When is this McGuinty government going to announce its plan to assist municipalities like Hamilton with their growing welfare rolls?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is well aware that Hamilton, like Ontario, like Canada, like North America, has not been sheltered from the terrible consequences of a global economic recession. It has affected all of us. But we have done a few things to help. For one thing, every single year we keep increasing the rates of social assistance. We've also accelerated the Ontario child benefit so that it is there for parents in our low-income families in a more meaningful way. Beyond that, of course, we are moving ahead with a package of tax reforms which are designed, centrally, to create more jobs.

If you ask the people of Hamilton, ask the mayor of Hamilton and ask Hamilton city council what it is that they need in their city, they will tell you that they want a stronger economy that creates more jobs. That is what we're all about. That was what the Pan Am bid was all about. That's what our HST package is all about. It's about creating more jobs for the people of Hamilton and, indeed, all the people of Ontario.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Health care continues to be the issue I hear from my constituents most frequently. They want good-quality care for their loved ones, close to where they live and when they need it. It's crucial that we continue to strive to reduce wait times for key surgeries so that Ontarians can get the care they need as fast as possible and move on with their lives.

As the minister knows, our hospitals in London are health care leaders and have made good progress in reducing wait times.

Could the minister please update this House on the progress made to provide faster care for Ontarians across the province and in London?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I agree with the member that we need to do more to continue to reduce wait times in surgeries, but let's take a minute to recognize how far we've come.

I'm pleased to report that not only did Ontario get five As in the Wait Time Alliance's report card this past June, but a recent Fraser Institute report released last month, called Waiting Your Turn, said Ontario has the lowest average wait times in Canada for key surgeries.

We're making real progress on wait times across the province: Wait times for hip replacements are down 185 days; knee replacements are down 262 days; cataract surgery is down 197 days. In London, hip replacement wait times are down 328 days at LHSC and knee replacements are down 450 days. That's well over a year of enjoying life, playing with grandkids—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Another area of importance for my constituents is how long they have to wait to get emergency medical care when they need it. When people have serious health issues that warrant a trip to the emergency room, the last thing they want to do is wait for hours, with the possibility that their condition can deteriorate.

I know that a lot of work has been done to provide enhanced services in my community so that only people with very urgent issues have to go to the emergency rooms.

Can the minister please explain what the government is doing to reduce wait times in emergency rooms?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Reducing emergency room wait times is a top priority for us. Last winter, we set ambitious wait times for our emergency departments. We also began posting the amount of time that Ontarians spend in ERs on our website. We did it because we govern on the principle that if you track it, you can improve it.

We are improving ER wait times. Compared to one year ago, Ontario hospitals have reduced ER wait times by nearly an hour. That's five million hours of time saved—one hour for every visit an Ontarian made to an ER over the course of a year. When you break it down, five million hours is about 570 years in saved time. That's meaningful to Ontarians. We're making progress and we're determined to keep on making progress.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. A couple of weeks ago, I asked the minister what the government could do for the 2,000 laid-off sawmill workers from across northwestern Ontario who, under the laws of Ontario, are entitled to severance pay and termination pay from their employer, the Buchanan Group of Companies, but who can't get paid. Regrettably, the minister had no answer.

Today, I want to ask about the dozens of contractors from communities like Geraldton, Manitouwadge, Nipigon and Armstrong who are owed hundreds of thousands of dollars by the Buchanan Group of Companies for contracts they have completed but can't get paid for.

Is the McGuinty government prepared to do anything for those thousands of laid-off workers who can't get paid and those dozens of contractors who can't get paid either?

1120

Hon. Michael Gravelle: As the member will know, we've been working very closely with all those involved in the challenging aspects of the forestry sector in northern Ontario. One thing I can say is that I'm very pleased that our government has been able to offer a conditional $25-million term loan to Terrace Bay Pulp to help finance the restart of the mill, and indeed, if that is successful, that may augur well for all those involved in the forestry sector in the north.

It's important to be clear that our offer of support is only one part of the equation in terms of the restart of the mill. It's conditional on Terrace Bay Pulp securing additional financing and also completing the court actions needed to allow them to exit from the CCAA process. But unquestionably, this is good news for the Terrace Bay-Schreiber area and good news ultimately, potentially, for people who are employed by Buchanan Forest Products through the Terrace Bay Pulp operation, and we're very hopeful this will lead to more good news.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister may be proud of that announcement. I have to tell him that it's not going to do anything to put people back to work, even in Terrace Bay, for the next three months, and it's certainly not going to do anything for the laid-off sawmill workers in Sioux Lookout, in Atikokan, in Thunder Bay, in Dubreuilville, nor the contractors in Manitouwadge or the contractors in Dryden or any of these other communities.

Minister, these are people who need to pay the bills. They have children to feed. They have rent to pay, mortgages to pay. Some of them have been out of work now for two years. They're legally owed this money. You've been very generous with the Buchanan Group of Companies—I think the total now is up to $120 million—but what are all these workers supposed to do? How are they supposed to pay their bills? Where is the provincial government in enforcing the provincial laws that say these people are entitled to be paid for work that they have done?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Clearly, the best solution for all is to get the forestry sector and the operations back up and running. We are hopeful that with this offer of conditional support to Terrace Bay Pulp, which is an important asset—I mean, this is an operation that really is an anchor in terms of the use of wood fibre between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, and again, the member for Kenora–Rainy River knows that well. We are obviously hopeful that indeed they are able to move forward and get further financing. Further, we are hopeful that that will move us towards a possibility and the opportunity for other operations to open up for the company as well.

There is no doubt, and the member knows this well, that it has been an extremely challenging time. I've worked very closely with the subcontractors who have

been involved, worked very closely with all the companies, in fact, that have been going through this very difficult time in the forestry sector, and we're doing everything we can to continue work. But this is good news, this is potentially very good news, and ultimately we hope it will lead to some very positive things in terms of having jobs back for many people in northwestern Ontario.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources.

In August, I had the good fortune to travel to Ontario's north, visiting the communities of Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay, Timmins and Chapleau with the committee on general government for hearings on both the Mining Act and the Far North Act. While there, the committee heard from many First Nations representatives who stressed the importance of having these communities consulted in the decision-making process of lands being developed in the far north. I remember Councillor McKay of the First Nations saying, "What you call the 'far north' is not the far north to us; it is our home. We need real participation in decision-making." It's vitally important that First Nations communities have a key role in the decision-making process of how land is used in the far north.

Minister, I understand you've just recently returned from a trip to the northern Ontario community of Pikangikum. Can you please tell the House how your ministry is considering consulting and working with this First Nations community on land use planning?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to thank the member for the question. It is absolutely vital that the First Nations are involved in the community land use planning, and that's why the government introduced the far north legislation. If that legislation is passed, in fact, the First Nations take the lead role in making a determination on that land use planning.

We were fortunate to work with Pikangikum First Nation as they went through with their planning called Keeping the Land, which was finalized in 2006. Since then, we've been working with Pikangikum First Nation as they move forward to implement their plan. We just jointly signed the terms of reference to support the protected areas and the forest management planning in the Whitefeather Forest. This actually will ensure that the planning takes place and that by 2012 we will have a plan in place.

But this also means that a total of 36% of the Whitefeather Forest and a total of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: The residents of Ontario's far north live beyond our traditional road and rail network. Some of these residents have criticized the Far North Act. As with elsewhere in the province, a common challenge is how to balance economic activity with environmental protection.

Minister, climate change is a real issue facing our world today. I understand that this proposed legislation will work to protect vast amounts of boreal forest and peatlands, which in turn will act as a large carbon sink and help to guard against global warming.

However, how will the Ministry of Natural Resources ensure there's a balance between adequate protection as well as adequate opportunity for economic development? Will the minister state for the record how her ministry will work with First Nations to find a balance between ecological protection and economic activity?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I can answer this quite plainly: We will ensure that there's a balance of protection for the environment and economic activity by working closely with First Nations communities as they develop their community-based land use plans.

There are eight First Nations communities that have established land use planning teams, and they are making very significant progress toward the preparation of their community-based land use plan. In total, there are 25 First Nations communities at various degrees of engagement with the Ministry of Natural Resources, and this level of engagement ranges from initial dialogue right through to the land use planning terms of reference.

I was delighted to be able to have a chance, as you heard, to sit down with Pikangikum First Nation in our extraordinary far north to discuss how they're going to proceed with their land use planning. I'd like to commend, in particular, elder Oliver for his vision as to where he felt that his First Nation needed to go, and for the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. You probably know that there are approximately one million condo owners in Ontario and most of them are in the area of Toronto. I think you probably know as well that there are many young people and many seniors living in these condos.

You might also have heard that property managers say—and they all agree—that the condo fees are likely to increase anywhere from $27 to $32 a month. Have you thought about the economic implications this is going to have on those young people and seniors who own a condominium?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the member for the question. We have taken that into account. It's why our income tax reforms are specifically geared to seniors on a fixed income and people with low income.

I want to say particularly to those who own condos, it is true that a condominium charges a condo fee that's provided by the property management company and that there are services that will attract a higher fee, but for every one of those services that the condo corporation engages in, all of those services—the price of business for those companies is going down because of our tax reform package.

So it is important for consumers to be aware—and I say that particularly for those who are on condo boards—

to say to the people who are running those condominiums, "Wait a minute. We understand about this HST, but let's not forget the other side of the equation."

It is true for all of those companies. Their cost of administration is going down, their taxes are going down, and for the very first time, they'll be able to claim input tax credits on the PST that they have been paying. So it is important—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: For the condominium owners, there is no other side. They know one side, and that is that they're going to get whacked by an additional $27 to $32 a month.

Eighty per cent of the condo fees connect to a service that's going to be charged—80%—and the other 20% is for reserve funds, and those too are going to go up.

We have been having meetings in my riding, and they are all very worried about the effect it's going to have on their ability to pay the extra $27 to $32 a month.

This is going to be devastating. It's not wrong, Minister of Finance: This is going to devastate a whole lot of people who live in condominiums. They will not be able to afford it, and nothing you have said so far alleviates the fact that they're going to get whacked, and whacked seriously.

Have you seriously thought about how this is going to affect them year after year, from now till the end of time?

1130

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would say to the member that he may want to read an independent report by TD Economics that was penned by Don Drummond, a leading economist in this country. He says that within the first year, some 80% of business savings will be passed through to the consumer. It's not only at Zellers where the lowest price is the law, I say to the member. People do not willingly overpay for anything. It is important for the consumers—those who own a condominium, who express their will through the property manager—that they expect them to negotiate the best price.

For all of those companies that will say to them, "We must charge you more for tax," each and every one of them, their price is going down. That's why Don Drummond has said that for the entire economy, some 80% of that will be passed through, but only if the consumer is aware.

I say to the member, the message that one has to get to your constituents is the importance for them to understand that they must demand those lower prices. They have that power—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Mike Colle: A question to the Minister of Finance: In the western part of my riding, in the Caledonia-Dufferin corridor, I have a lot of small manufacturers. Over the last few years, I have to tell you what has happened: There has been de-industrialization taking place, with a lot of small factories closing down.

What I'm really interested in knowing is, this new change in the single tax, the HST, how is it going to try and—the NDP are laughing. These people have lost their jobs; they can't pay their rent; they can't pay their mortgage. It's nothing to laugh at. They're saying, "What can the government do?"

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: The former leader of the NDP thinks it's funny.

These people want to know what our government is doing with this new single tax to try and bring some of the jobs back. What can they do to maybe hold on to some of these jobs? How can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I thank the member for the question and for his genuine concern about the future of our economy and job creation. The tax package we've brought forward is indeed intended to create jobs. Now we have a range of economists of all political stripes saying that this package will create jobs: Mr. Mintz says some 591,000; a variety of other sources make the same kind of claim. It's backed up by economists such as Hugh Mackenzie and Jim Stanford, from the other side. Canadian vehicle manufacturers, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters have all endorsed this package because it will reduce the tax burden overall, not only for businesses but for consumers. It will make our tax system more efficient, and it will, in fact, create jobs. That's the purpose of it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Especially with the manufacturing jobs, supposedly right now the manufacturer is paying double and triple PST. It gets replicated. In other words, they don't pay it just once, they pay it two or three times. So if we bring in this new tax reform, is it going to result in them lowering their production costs or administrative costs? Will it mean they can actually stay in Ontario, stay in my riding and provide hope for people who right now don't know where to turn for these jobs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The overall package, including the harmonized sales tax itself, will in fact reduce the tax burden to businesses and lower prices for consumers.

Roger Martin, in his task force on competitiveness, put out five myths about the HST.

The first myth is that it will increase prices paid by consumers. The reality is prices will come down as manufacturers and retailers pay lower sales taxes. There's evidence of this from eastern Canada, sir.

The other myth: This will raise costs for small businesses. In fact, costs will decrease as small businesses recover sales taxes they have to pay on goods and services they purchase, and it lowers administrative costs.

The third myth: This is a tax grab. The fact is, increased revenue from the HST is matched by reductions in tax cuts and tax credits. The effect is revenue-neutral.

This is the right plan to create jobs. This government, this party—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question for the Minister of Culture: There was supposed to be a permanent PST exemption for theatres that was crushed with the introduction of the HST. This is going to hurt theatre all over this province. What are you going to do about it?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I understand that the honourable member is coming forward with a private member's bill to ask the government to extend tax credits to live productions here in this city akin to our tax credits that exist for TV and film production. I think that this is an issue he wants to see brought forward to the House, and we'll do so. It will give members of the House the opportunity to discuss the relative merits of that suggestion, so I would await such legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't think the minister heard the question, but I will go along in the vein that many musicians represented by the American Federation of Musicians play weddings and parties. They know they can't pass on that HST; they're going to have to eat it. How are you going to help freelance musicians who are going to see their income drop as a result of this tax?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I think this government has a remarkable record on the investments we have made in the industry wherein those very performers benefit from employment and from increased activity, and we've done so by a whole series of tax credits that benefit the entire industry.

It's always easy to take one particular segment and carve it off, but I think one has to look at the track record of this government and what we've done for the cultural industries as a whole, recognizing as we do that they contribute $20 billion a year to our GDP. We see them as an industry of the future and we see the Ministry of Culture as an economic tool to assist the enhancement of that sector. So I don't think it's at all fair to take one piece and say, "But they don't have this particular set of tax credits, ergo they're not part and parcel of the huge success of the cultural—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: You have often chastised members of the House for matters of decorum, and I want to say that you haven't had to do that with members of the House today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. That is not a point of order. I thank the honourable member.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Many of you know that today is Laubach Literacy Ontario's Awareness Day here at Queen's Park. There are a number of people here from across the province. I'd like to mention in particular some who are in the gallery today: Sue Bannon, the president; Lana Faessler, the executive director; and Carol Risidore, the vice-president; Gary Porter, who is a board member and a former student; and, from the Midland area reading council, Jennifer Ellis, the program coordinator; Bob Sture, a board member; and Lin Sullivan, a board member.

I wish everybody in the House would give these people a warm welcome of appreciation today.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Arden Ryshpan, the executive director of Canadian Actors' Equity; Jim Biros, the executive director of the Toronto Musicians' Association, affiliated with the American Federation of Musicians; Paul Taylor, from the International Association of Theatre and Stage Employees; and Lynn McQueen, also from Canadian Actors' Equity. I'd like to welcome them here as well.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to share the concerns of my constituents in Parry Sound–Muskoka regarding this government's proposed harmonized sales tax. Here's a small sampling of the hundreds of e-mails I've received.

"Mr. Miller, please do all you can to stop the proposed HST. I am living just outside Parry Sound, self-employed and working hard to save for retirement.

"This HST will drive all of the costs of living up, and in a time of economic difficulty, I am greatly shocked that the Liberals are pulling this stunt.

"Please help stop the proposed HST and the gouging of the Ontario taxpayer."

That's from Dave in Parry Sound.

Another letter:

"Dear Norm:

"My wife and I live in Barkway, near Gravenhurst. We moved here three years ago to retire.

"We have never had to really complain till now. The McGuinty government has really done it this time. Since we are on a fixed income, how are we supposed to survive?

"Thanks for listening and please fight for us retirees."

That's from Bill in Barkway.

Another e-mail: "There must be a better way for the province to deal with its budget deficit. We, as a retired couple, have calculated that our living expenses will go up at least $2,100 a year. This is outrageous." That is from Hans and Jeanette.

It is clear from the hundreds of e-mails I'm receiving that the public wants to be heard on this new proposed HST, so that's why I'm asking for public consultations on Bill 218 across the province.

KURDISH COMMUNITY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise here today to welcome the Kurdish community to the Ontario Legislature and to do my best in giving my colleagues and the public a better understanding of the Kurdish people and their rich history.

Kurdistan, literally meaning "the land of Kurds," is an extensive plateau and mountainous area in the Middle East, inhabited mainly by Kurds. It covers part of eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran and part of northern Syria.

The people of the region of Kurdistan have a rich history, filled with tremendous influences of cultures and traditions which have moulded their people into a very unique community in the region.

After years of political oppression, the Kurds have been able to move forward in the last few years. Kurds residing in Iraq have a provincial government representing them which has been recognized by the international community as an autonomous federal entity. The Kurds residing in Iran are also considered a minority and have a province named Kurdistan in western Iran.

I wish to once again welcome the Kurdish community to the Legislature and extend my warmest greetings and best wishes.

Remarks in Kurdish. Welcome and thank you.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise in the House today to bring special attention to the funding crisis at Ontario children's aid societies.

I've had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Durham children's aid. Like the majority of Ontario children's aid societies, they are facing a budget shortfall. The Durham Children's Aid Society has established a budget based on its legal obligations and the best interests of vulnerable children and youth. If the provincial government forces the Durham children's aid and other children's aids to balance their budgets, drastic cutbacks will be forced in programming, staff and services.

I would urge this McGuinty government to put the interests of children and families first, above all. Reduced funding means reduced protection for children at risk. This government must honour its commitment to fund child welfare services in accordance with the Child and Family Services Act.

It's just like the issue with respect to the HST: They won't listen; they won't have public meetings. This is one more example of a failed government.

DANFORTH EAST COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to talk about an amazing group of people in my riding who deeply care about our community and the neighbourhood in which they live. The Danforth East Community Association, or DECA, as they're more commonly known, is a fledgling group of residents who want to help make our neighbourhood more beautiful, vibrant and, particularly, more safe. DECA's boundaries are between Coxwell Avenue and Main Street, and from Mortimer/Lumsden down to the train tracks south of Danforth. My constituency office is located in this great neighbourhood, and we're very proud to be part of that community.

DECA is helping to bring neighbours together and foster a stronger sense of community. Its members are greening and beautifying the streets and parks, improving the commercial strip on Danforth Avenue, taking action to reduce crime, and planning community events. As the Toronto Star tells it, three years ago, a group of families and professionals formed DECA. They've been knocking on storefronts in need of tender loving care, and they've been getting it. Eight of them have been revamped so far.

When drug dealers came by, DECA was there to put a halt to it. They went to the local park. They had square dances and movies. Two years ago, they spearheaded what has become a popular farmers' market in the reclaimed space. We attend this quite often.

Tonight, they will be meeting at Melanie's Bistro, one of the new restaurants that have moved into the area, to have a cocktail party to meet and greet the neighbours.

I just want to say today how very proud we are of their accomplishments to date.

PAN-AM GAMES

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I am excited at the great news that the Pan-Am Games are coming to Ontario in 2015. The benefits of hosting these games will be felt in many areas in Ontario, including Scarborough and my riding of Scarborough Southwest.

The Scarborough area is hosting several competitions, including swimming, diving, fencing and sitting volleyball.

To host these competitions, a new sports complex will be built at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus. The complex will include gymnasiums, fitness and training facilities, two Olympic-sized pools and a 10-metre diving tank. All new sports infrastructures will continue to serve our athletes and the local community for many years to come.

But that's not the only benefit of hosting these games. They also bring a great economic boost to my community and many other areas in Scarborough, with increased tourism and jobs.

I would like to congratulate everyone who participated in the successful bid to bring the Pan-Am Games to Ontario, including Premier McGuinty and Minister Best. This is great news for our province and my community of Scarborough Southwest, and I look forward to the 2015 Pan-Am Games. They will be a success for Scarborough, for Ontario and for all involved.

ADULT LITERACY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Earlier, I introduced people from Laubach Literacy Ontario, who are here today for their Literacy Awareness Day, and I want to thank them for being here.

We started this sort of lobby back in the winter with a resolution I had asking the government to provide adequate funding for these organizations to exist, and I thank the government for bringing forward some money. Apparently, it's a two-year funding model, and after that, we're not really sure what's happening. Part of the lobby here today is to make sure that no matter who is in power, the government understands how important literacy is to the province of Ontario.

We've lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Many of the people who worked in those jobs don't have proper literacy skills, and in order to work in the future, they need to have these basic literacy skills to move forward.

These are the people who are actually helping those people through the use of volunteers.

1310

Their funding has been frozen for a long time. We've got a little bit more money now, but we need to make sure, through these awareness days, that all of the provincial political parties realize how important this is to the economy of Ontario so that when these people are trained, they get out, get more self-esteem and meaningful, positive jobs and help contribute to the strong Ontario economy we hope to have again someday.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

Mr. David Ramsay: I'd like to share with the House some good news that's happening in my riding of Timiskaming–Cochrane, especially in regard to Northern College. Northern College is the fastest-growing college in this province—I'm very proud of that—and especially in two of the campuses which are located in my riding. The first-year enrolment at the Haileybury campus has increased by 46%, and there's been a 31% increase at the Kirkland Lake campus.

What's very exciting is that we opened the other day, right at the Haileybury campus in an old high school that was renovated by Northern College, a veterinary technology course. This is a one-, two-, and three-year course that is available to our young people to help all our four-legged critters, and they have lots of those in supply. There are dogs and cats there. The first year, they learn how to do grooming, and then they get into more medical procedures and research.

One of the very interesting things that's unique to the Northern College veterinary technology course is that they have wildlife rehabilitation. As we know, because we all get letters from a lot of our constituents, there's a lot of need for helping injured wildlife. We have a centre to do that and we now are training our young people to be able to do that too, so it's very exciting. Some 140 of these students are doing that, and I'm very grateful for the northern Ontario heritage grant for helping us out with almost $1 million to make that happen.

TAXATION

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The Leader of the Opposition addressed the London Chamber of Commerce on Friday and spoke about the HST. I have listened to him repeatedly use his careful wording to sway Ontarians into thinking the HST is bad when, in fact, experts and economists have agreed that it's good news for Ontarians. But even as the Leader of the Opposition thunders against the HST, he has constantly refused to answer this question: Will he commit to repealing the HST? I think Ontarians need to know. I want to know the answer to this question.

If he is so opposed to the HST tax reform package which will create nearly 600,000 jobs and cut taxes for 93% of Ontario families, then why won't he commit to repealing the HST? Once again, the opposition leader failed to answer the question. He ducked and dodged and refused to commit to reversing a single tax change that the McGuinty government has proposed.

I exposed the truth about the Leader of the Opposition and the HST to Londoners last week. Everyone in Ontario should know that Mr. Hudak has no intention of reversing the HST. Thank you for allowing me to speak and tell the people of Ontario about the position of the Leader of the Opposition on the HST, which, as I said many different times, will create more than 600,000 jobs for Ontarians.

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: The leader of the official opposition says that the public is against our government's proposed harmonized sales tax, but according to the Belleville Intelligencer newspaper, the only thing Ontarians are rejecting is the Leader of the Opposition and his attempts to spin Ontarians.

An editorial in the newspaper said, "Tim Hudak couldn't draw flies on a whistle stop to Belleville and the chamber breakfast on Wednesday saw an embarrassing paucity of bacon 'n eggers to listen to Hudak tune up his campaign speech, attacking the harmonized sales tax."

But that's not all the newspaper noted. It also says he got his facts wrong about the Belleville area. "He cited Dacoma Autosystems and Stream International as being battered on the job front. Both are recalling employees by the hundreds." As the editorial says, it's not enough to place [insert city name here] in your anti-HST rants.

I think the visit to Belleville clarifies what Ontarians really oppose. They are opposed to being spun by false information on the HST, and that's why he's speaking to empty rooms.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm not sure if it is a rule or if it's convention, Mr. Speaker—perhaps you can give us some guidance on this—but I believe that it is parliamentary convention that there usually be a minister in the House, and I don't see a minister in the House.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You asked and you shall receive.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Standing order 63(a) provides that "the Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year."

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 19, 2009, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 63(b), the estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Accordingly, the estimates for 2009-10 of these ministries are deemed to be passed by the Standing Committee on Estimates and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DRIVETEST LABOUR DISPUTE RESOLUTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RÈGLEMENT DU CONFLIT DE TRAVAIL CHEZ TEST AU VOLANT

Mr. Wilson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 225, An Act to resolve the labour dispute between DriveTest and United Steelworkers, Local 9511 / Projet de loi 225, Loi visant à résoudre le conflit de travail opposant Test au volant et la section locale 9511 du Syndicat des Métallos.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1317 to 1322.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Wilson, Jim
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Paul	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 14; the nays are zero.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion passed.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Jim Wilson: This bill addresses the labour dispute between DriveTest and the United Steelworkers Local 9511, which is currently in its 14th week. It requires the termination of the ongoing strike that has affected some 368,000 Ontarians. If passed, this bill would return 600 DriveTest employees to work. Since the strike began, 4,000 Ontarians per day have been unable to get their licence because of the ongoing labour dispute. As a result, no applicants have been able to obtain drivers' licences, and the economy and livelihood of Ontarians has been disrupted. This bill will end the strike that has negatively impacted the residents of my riding and of all of Ontario.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT (LIVE PERFORMANCES), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS (SPECTACLES)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 226, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 with respect to live performances / Projet de loi 226, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts à l'égard des spectacles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The bill amends the Taxation Act, 2007, to give the Lieutenant Governor in Council the power to create regulations providing for tax credit for live performances. The bill also gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council the power to specify the rules of eligibility for the tax credit, the methods of claiming and obtaining the tax credit, and any other matter relating to the tax credit.

My thanks to Equity, IATSE and the American Federation of Musicians.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real pleasure today to rise and read a petition from my constituents in the riding of Durham. I have thousands of these petitions and they're all on HST, but I'll read one:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses use every day. A few examples include: coffee"—well, that's been cancelled; we have to modify this, they've backed down on that one—"newspapers"—they've backed down—"and magazines; condo fees;" health services; "haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the" dreaded "health tax, which costs upwards of $600 to $900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes" yet "again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes" continuously "on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and pass it to the table with Christopher, one of the new pages here.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from the residents of the city of greater Sudbury, which means the ridings of Sudbury and Nickel Belt, and they are asking for a PET scan.

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning, a publicly insured health service; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Olivia.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: The petition is titled Scrap the 13% McGuinty Sales Tax. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the 13% McGuinty sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline, heat, telephone, cable, and Internet services; and

"Whereas the 13% McGuinty sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for coffins, coffee, haircuts, gym memberships, newspapers, lawyer and accountant fees and meals under $4"—and we know the government has backed down on several of these items;

"We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I affix my signature to these petitions.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a similar petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians already pay more than their fair share of taxes; and

1330

"Whereas the Liberal government's proposed harmonized sales tax (HST) will add 8% to purchases like gym memberships, running shoes, vitamins, coffee, gasoline, heating oil, natural gas, hydro, newspapers, magazines, landscaping, Internet access, theatre tickets and home renovations;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cancel the implementation of this unreasonable, unaffordable and untimely tax."

I am in agreement and would sign my signature thereto.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is proclaiming April as Hispanic Heritage Month. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, film, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" to support Mr. Tony Ruprecht's and Mr. Mike Colle's proclamations that April of each year be proclaimed as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario.

Of course I support this petition. I'm delighted to sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition signed by what would appear to be almost every person in my riding. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

CEMETERIES

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My petition is:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in a brand-new tax on income that they inaccurately claimed was going to 'health care'; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: gas at the pumps; home heating oil and electricity; postage stamps; haircuts; dry cleaning; home renovations; veterinary care; and arena ice and soccer field rentals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I support this petition and have affixed my signature to it.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Mr. Dave Levac: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery, as these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health ... issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts, skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventive reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money than said health issues would cost over time."

I affix my name to this petition and offer it to Olivia, our page.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax ... that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over $400,000, fast food under $4"—which is exempt now—"electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than $30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs,

commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

RAILROAD BRIDGE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This is a petition to the Minister of Transportation. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Bloor Street West between Lansdowne Avenue and Dundas Street West has been identified as the only stretch of Bloor Street that has no landscaping; and

"Whereas the neighbourhood near 1369 Bloor Street West has been recognized as a priority revitalization area by a city of Toronto study in 2000; and

"Whereas items for beautification include:

"(1) Developing terraced walls with flowers and planters near the railroad bridge;

"(2) Constructing new abutment walls;

"(3) Cleaning, painting and reconstructing the rusty, dilapidated railroad bridge; and

"(4) Creating brightly lit murals underneath the bridge in order to make it more secure and more people-friendly;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request in the strongest terms that our city government immediately reactivate the 2000 reconstruction plan and CNR immediately proceed with improvements to the bridge" and that the provincial government support this plan.

"We look forward to a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape. We want to be proud to live here."

Since I agree, I am delighted to sign my name to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include: ... gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; condo fees; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of $600 to $900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

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"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I agree with this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with Vanessa.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from workers in my riding.

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at" more than "$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets $4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces, and thus ... not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I support the petition and I affix my name to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history" at that time; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: arena ice and baseball field rentals; gas at the pumps; magazines; home heating oil and electricity; gym fees; golf fees; ski lift fees; and movie tickets, just to name a few;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes,

once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I affix my name in full support.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has given me notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege. His point relates to the circumstances under which the House entered upon orders of the day for consideration of Bill 218 last Thursday morning.

I'm prepared to rule on the matter without hearing further from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

I will first say that I am satisfied with the procedural correctness with which debate was commenced last Thursday on Bill 218. After calling orders of the day, I permitted the member for Leeds–Grenville to raise a point of privilege, of which he had given me notice the previous afternoon.

After hearing from the member, the member from Timmins–James Bay and the government House leader, I reserved my ruling on that point of privilege.

At that point, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills raised a point of order, which I dealt with, and then the member for Oshawa raised a point of order, which I also dealt with. I then recognized the Minister of Finance, who called order G218. The deputy clerk then read the order for second reading of Bill 218, following which I recognized the Minister of Finance to commence the debate.

I will say that I was deliberate in following the normal sequence of events—though they were interrupted with the point of privilege and the points of order—and I have no reservation about the fact that all was in order and Bill 218 was properly brought before the House for debate.

I might also say that this matter raised by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka is more correctly a point of order and not a point of privilege. The orderliness of the proceedings was not challenged at the time they occurred and so there can be no revising of them now.

I thank the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for raising this matter, but do not find that he has made out a valid case of privilege.

OPPOSITION DAY

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call on the Premier and the Minister of Finance to hold extensive public hearings on Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts, with such public hearings taking place over a minimum of three weeks and in a minimum of 10 communities across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. MacLeod has moved opposition day number 5. Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Before I begin my remarks, I would like to acknowledge those in the gallery today from the Public Sector Retirees Coalition of retired municipal, fire and police workers in this province. They have done tremendous work on our behalf. They have built this province.

I'd also like to welcome another two diverse groups. One is the camp association of Ontario, who provide charity camps for children across this great province, as well as CI Financial employees who work in the mutual fund sector and who are providing valuable advice and services for the people of this province.

On behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus, I am proud to stand today, on behalf of Ontarians on either side of the HST debate, to demand that the Premier and the Minister of Finance hold extensive public hearings on Bill 218.

Last week, when the Liberals brought forward a sweeping omnibus bill that, when passed, will usher in the harmonized sales tax, the largest single sales tax increase in our province's history, they decided that they were also going to ram the legislation through without any public consultation.

On July 1, 2010, Ontarians will be paying 8% more for everyday essentials like home heating oil and gas for their cars. They'll also be paying more for veterinary bills, haircuts and Internet access fees. With such sweeping changes, Ontarians deserve to have a voice in a debate that is going to change how much they pay for their essentials.

Denying public consultation on one of the biggest tax changes in history came as a result of some of the rules they abused last week. They have used time allocation, and will continue to use time allocation, to cripple our debate, and they have ignored legitimate points of order about abuse of process.

The PC caucus is disappointed, but we are not surprised by the tactics of this government. That is why we will continue to call for public consultation and use every available tool at our disposal to call for public consultation, to disrupt the passage of this terrible tax hike, and we will make it clear that the McGuinty Liberals are prepared to use and abuse parliamentary privilege and their majority to have their way.

In the run-up to the GST, the Mulroney government held extensive public, province-wide consultations. In its hearings, the committee heard 274 sets of witnesses. They analyzed over 1,100 briefs and other representations. The committee completed its public hearings on October 26, 1989, but Bill C-62, which would implement the GST and related changes to other statutes, was not tabled until July 24, 1990.

And here we are. We're asking that Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Duncan follow Mr. Mulroney's lead, follow the lead of a person who had the courage of his convictions, who,

when he decided to overhaul the taxation system in our nation, decided to go province to province, community to community and hear from the people before he tabled the legislation.

Once upon a time, Mr. McGuinty used this quote: "'Public hearings'; those two words go together nicely if you believe in true democracy...." Also in a true democracy, it is the rules that prevent the tyranny of the majority over the minority. Yet time and time again we have seen in this chamber the abuse of their majority to shut us down, to shut consultations down and to shut down public debate.

We on this side are very concerned about the $3-billion tax grab that is going to be put on the backs of the folks who send their kids to camp, the people who are retiring and live on a fixed income, and those middle-class families who desire to have a better future by putting precious dollars away in their mutual funds for retirement.

But equally concerning to us are the hidden details about this tax that the current government seems content to obscure and intent to ignore when the public raises them. We think these are all legitimate public discussion points and debate that voters and Ontario taxpayers ought to have a say about. I'm going to briefly run through them.

Under the HST, Ontario is going to surrender its constitutionally granted taxation powers to the whim of future federal governments. Once the HST is enacted, fundamental decisions about what is and what is not going to be subject to direct sales taxation will be made, not in this chamber, not by people who have been duly elected to decide such things; they will instead be made in Ottawa. It is not hard to foresee a day when a federal finance minister from outside of Ontario will decide the fate of Ontario businesses when there is a tax dispute.

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Under the HST, it is likely that tax-included pricing, or hidden taxation, will come to Ontario. In 1997, when Jean Chrétien brought forward a change to the Excise Tax Act, he allowed for hidden taxation when 51% of the population bought into the HST. You know as well as I do that Ontarians prefer to see what they are taxed, not the other way around.

I also want to clarify: The McGuinty government will, from time to time, talk about the 130 nations that are also promoting the value-added tax. That's misleading. No other developed nation has successfully imposed a joint—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Nepean–Carleton will withdraw that word.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Which one was that, Mr. Speaker?

Interjection: "Dalton McGuinty"?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No. You know which one.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

No other developed nation has successfully imposed a joint value-added tax at both the federal and state levels. In any case, Canada's federation is dissimilar to that in many OECD countries.

Finally, this is something that the Liberals don't want Ontarians to know. It's something that they would prefer hidden. It's something that they do not want to talk about at committee with everyday Ontarians. The fact is that once this HST is implemented, it will be impossible to repeal without massive penalties, and that massive penalty is that Ontario will be forced to repay the $4.3 billion in bribe money that this government is going to be giving away right before the next election.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Unfortunately, the Liberals opposite don't understand that there was an agreement called the CITCA that actually spells this out. If you don't think Ontario can afford $4.3 billion today, what do you think we're going to be doing in two years, after they finish this mandate?

This government has taken us from first to worst in economic growth. They've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. And for the first time next week, we're going to be celebrating the worst thing this province has ever seen, and that's one year of getting handouts from the federal government. At the same time, they're trying to bring this massive tax onto our friends in the mutual fund industry, our friends who are retired and our friends who are trying to send their kids to camp.

I'm just going to briefly conclude here, but mark my words: Even if they think that once they pass this legislation and ram it through the Ontario Legislature it's over, it's not even by a country mile, because the PC caucus does not consider the HST law until the people of Ontario are paying 8% more on July 1, 2010. If enough Ontario voters speak out, Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal backbench are going to be forced to repeal his record-breaking tax grab in his 2010 budget.

As I conclude, I've had the privilege of bringing stakeholders from across Ontario into this Legislature in the past couple of weeks to attend press conferences. All of them spoke, basically in unanimity, that we need public consultation in Ontario. I'm going to read from a few of them.

My friend Jim Garchinski of the public sector retiree coalition, who's in the chamber today, said, "We're all vehemently opposed to this HST by a government that is about to unilaterally force another massive tax grab on citizens of Ontario."

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said, "The lack of public consultation has, in part, generated mixed reviews about the harmonized tax. A recent CFIB survey of small and medium-sized businesses points to growing concerns about the lack of information and the impact on consumers."

Peter Coleman of the National Citizens Coalition said, "We believe consumers deserve a voice. There has been zero"—zero—"public consultations, it's time they do. We would support the public consultation process."

And finally, last week, Christine McMillan, chair of the Councils on Aging Network of Ontario, said, "We

think if they got out of their ivory tower and listened to the people on the street they would have a better understanding of the impact this will have. We would like them to really hear from people."

So there you have it: a clear invitation from the people of Ontario and the official opposition to get out of their ivory tower and onto Main Street, to listen to the people, listen to the hairdressers, listen to the plumbers, listen to the electricians—but listen to the people who make this province what it is, because they don't want it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise in support of this motion. This motion is a motion that surely must pass this House.

Some would have you believe that the only function of citizenship of this province and of this country is that a citizen is given power but once every four years and exercises that power by going to vote, and that that is the only and sole responsibility of the citizenry of this province. I reject that notion, and I think the members ought to reject that notion as well.

Not only do we require citizens to exercise their franchise and go out and vote every four years, but we expect a great deal more from them, a great deal more than going out and delivering some pamphlets at election time, making some phone calls, putting up signs or collecting funds to run the election. That is on the periphery.

What we expect most is that those citizens not go into a cocoon after they have voted and exercised their political rights but be participants throughout. They are every bit as much citizens today as they were during the last election in 2007, and they must have every bit as much right to go out there and do what is necessary to channel their elected people, to support them, to tell them what they want, to tell them about how they need to vote, to tell them what their concerns are and to see that expressed in the everyday debate of this House.

Some believe that a citizen's right only extends to choosing a representative. I reject that. A citizen's right is to participate in all things political.

Aristotle, in his great works, taught us that Man—he said "Man" in those days, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I don't want to change what he said—is a political animal, and that a man—and a woman, too, today—is entitled to be a political animal throughout his life, to live in a political environment, to make political decisions and to participate fully in the political process.

There was another great philosopher—perhaps some of the members opposite have heard of him: Edmund Burke. I often want to go back and look—he wrote a treatise on the electors of Bristol. I haven't read it in full for a number of years, but I remember studying it in university.

Edmund Burke was a genius of a man who put forward two propositions: the proposition that an elected representative would be elected by the people and then would go off and do whatever he—because in those days it was only men—thought was right for the next four years, and the electors would judge him at the end of that process.

He also put forward another proposition, with which he was much more comfortable and the one I think that people today are much more comfortable with, and that is that the person who was elected was both a representative and a delegate, because it was his responsibility as an elected representative to listen to the people who sent him there, to listen to what their grievances were, to what their hopes and aspirations were, and to put words to that. It was the responsibility of the delegated representative to vote in as many ways as the people who sent him there wanted him to vote.

That isn't what I'm seeing here today. I am seeing a fundamentally different attitude from the members in government. They are behaving as if the people who sent them here are somehow irrelevant today.

They were very relevant at the time of the election. They were very relevant when they collected money for you and put up signs for you and made phone calls for you and entreated their neighbours to vote for you. But they somehow seem not too relevant today, do they, member from Brant? Do they seem relevant to you as you shake your head?

I'm saying that they don't seem so relevant to me when they don't want to hear of them. They don't want to hear them, they don't want them to come down to this Legislature and they don't want to go to the many locations around the province that are being put forward in this motion. They don't want to hear what they actually have to say.

There are some members and some people who think that representative democracy isn't perhaps all it's cut out to be, but I would suggest that it is the very best of systems, because not only is it the best of systems and it legitimizes what we say and do in this Legislature, but it also legitimizes what ordinary people have to say. It presupposes that the citizens have an unfettered right to have views and to have their views made directly to those who represent them. It's important for me to know not only what the citizens of Beaches–East York who sent me to this place think, but what every citizen of the province thinks—citizens in Brantford, what they think; citizens in Pickering, what they think; citizens in Ottawa, what they think; citizens in North Bay, what they think. I need to know what the people of this province are saying—ordinary people, respected people, people who have a view, people who know of what they speak and who know what the impact is going to be upon them of any legislation, but particularly of this one.

1400

It presupposes that everyone and every view must be carefully weighed. I believe that the views of every individual are important. Every single individual has something to contribute to the political debate. I believe that a farmer has as much to tell me about this bill or any other bill as a lawyer does. I believe that a factory worker has as much to tell me about this bill or any bill as a doctor does. I believe that a small business has every bit

as much to tell me about this bill or any bill as a paid consultant who advises this government does. I believe that retired police officers, many of whom are present here today, have every bit as much to say about this bill and to have me listen to what they have to say as an economist, especially a paid economist who's now advising this government. All of them have something to contribute, and we owe it to them to allow them to speak out and make that contribution.

What is being suggested, in my view, is a complete reversal of représentative democracy. In fact, what is being suggested here by members of the government, particularly the finance minister and the Premier, amounts to nothing more than a plutocracy. What they are trying to say and what they say here every day is that they are listening to experts. They quote Mr. Mintz ad infinitum, a person who, a few months ago, they were dissing for his beliefs. They quote people who they never thought they had any use for before because those economists were not in agreement with them. They quote them as if they are somehow experts beyond reproach whom ordinary people cannot understand and whom ordinary people cannot comment upon.

I have some huge problems with this. I have some huge problems probably with almost all economists, particularly ones in western society, only one of which—and I can't even remember his name—even forecasted that we were going to go into such a deep recession. They were all saying things were going to be fine. It is not for no reason that economics is called the dismal science, because in fact it is very dismal. It is very dismal because the prognostications very seldom come true and those who are making those hold themselves out to be experts and often see their expertise is wanting. It is these experts whom this government is relying on. In my view, the only true and real expertise that exists is the collective wisdom of the people of this province. Every four years we trust them to make a collective wisdom on who they send to this place, but quite frankly I don't see the members opposite asking for the collective wisdom when they need it most, and that is in the making of particularly contentious policies like the one here today. The Premier likes to quote those—but doesn't want to go directly to ordinary people, doesn't want to talk about what ordinary people have to say and their expertise. He invites ordinary people to go to other fora. He tells them, "It's okay. You can't speak to the Legislature—we don't want to have committee hearings—but use other fora that are available to you. Write a letter to the editor." Well, we all know ordinary people, when they write a letter to the editor, are very, very lucky to ever see that letter published. We all know that you could write hundreds and hundreds of letters and probably never see one of your letters published, especially in the big dailies in Toronto. But, increasingly so, in smaller town Ontario, where there are so many people wanting to write about this, the letters cannot all be published. So you can write a letter, but nothing happens to it. Nobody ever sees it except the editorial branch, who scan it over and say, "It's not worth it," and put it in the little round bin. So there's what ordinary people can do and what the Premier suggests they can do.

He suggests they call in to radio talk shows, as if some radio talk show host is going to make a decision. I know some of them are pretty good at stirring the pot. I have a colleague here who likes to stir the pot from time to time, even likes to stir the pot with me in the middle of it, which he did on the weekend.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yeah. But that is not a person who makes a decision. That's a person who stirs the pot. Sure, you can pick up the phone, phone a radio talk show host and rant and rave, but nothing comes of it, except perhaps that you might influence some other people who like to listen to that kind of program. That's all that happens to it. The Premier suggests this is a good thing.

The Premier suggests other things, like going to Liberal-sponsored meetings: Invite all your Liberal friends into a meeting and bore them for an hour and a half on how good the HST is, because it takes an hour and a half to get down to why it's good, and even then I don't think it can be done. But it's not a simple exercise. It's not a simple exercise for them. It's pretty simple for me to tell somebody, when you're going to buy your next litre of gas, that instead of costing you 95 cents, it's going to cost $1.03. Everybody understands that in one second. They know what HST is all about. But no: Over there, they say you have to look at the whole package. You have to look at 100 amendments and how all these little things fit together. I would think that anybody who didn't have insomnia at the end of that Liberal meeting would be an insomniac for life, because there would be no hope and no cure for them. They should be long asleep.

He also suggests that attending these hand-picked Liberal meetings is the way to get your message out, but I reject that because it is not just the hand-picked Liberal meetings and it's not just people coming to see their own MPP that is important here. It is the process of what goes on in this Legislature, and it is indeed the process of what goes on in committee and the final vote: that everyone is participating in it, that all the best views are known, that ordinary people have spoken, we have listened, and we have taken the right course of action.

I have listened in vain, in absolute vain, in shock and some dismay over these past few weeks for a rationale coming out of the government as to why ordinary people cannot be heard. I have listened and listened about why ordinary people cannot be heard, and I have not heard a single reason. All that is said and is ever spoken about is to quote from whichever deemed expert is in vogue that day: whatever Jack Mintz said, whatever came out on the weekend from a "respected economist" who wasn't respected by the government at all before the report was written, whatever chamber of commerce has added its name to saying this is going to help a particular business or two. Nothing is heard at all about small business people. Nothing is heard at all from consumers or the

retired. Nothing is heard at all of the people who send us here. Nothing. Nothing is quoted.

When members of the opposition stand up, when the Conservatives and the New Democrats stand up and read ordinary letters and ordinary people's views into the record, they are dismissed. They are dismissed as cavalierly and with such ease as one would be shocked at. If one follows the political process, one can only be shocked at how those opinions are dismissed right out of hand as being irrelevant.

1410

This is a large province. Anyone who has had the opportunity to travel from one end of this province to the other will know how large it is.

I had the opportunity, albeit not successfully, to run for leader of my party. I travelled by car some 20,000 kilometres. I burnt out a transmission; it cost me a lot of money; but I met some wonderful people. I met them from Cornwall in the east down to Amherstburg, south of Windsor. Some Ontarians are surprised that there's anything south of Windsor, but there is, Mr. Speaker, as you know. I've met them in far northern Ontario. I've met them throughout the length and breadth of that middle portion.

They're wonderful people. They all have different tales to tell. They all have something important to say. They all need to be heard. What is relevant to me, as a member from the Toronto area, and what is relevant to my constituents is not exactly on point to what is relevant to a farmer in Leamington, a steelworker in Hamilton, a farmer in New Liskeard, a forester or logger in northern Ontario or a miner in Sudbury or Timmins. They have different views; they have different needs. We need to hear all of them, every single one of them. We need to have input that reflects truly what they have to say to us.

It is not good enough, and will never be good enough, for this Legislature to say, "It's too cumbersome. It takes too long. Don't want to hear. I have an expert already." That is not what we are here for.

If you want a government to be run by experts, let the experts run it. Plato suggested the same thing 3,000 years ago: Just let the experts run it; don't let ordinary people do it at all. That has been rejected for all of that period of time, right through parliamentary democracy, and surely must be rejected today. It ought not to be what the Premier says when he answers the questions: that somehow a plutocracy of some economist or other who is now in vogue is the answer to all of it.

Things are going to go up. People know they're going to go up. People are afraid, depending on their circumstances. If you are contemplating buying a house in the Toronto area, you can probably contemplate paying more than $400,000 for it. Therefore, you can contemplate having to pay HST on that balance above $400,000.

If you are a condo owner, you can contemplate your condo fees going up $27 to $32 a month. Every economist, every condominium corporation, every condominium manager is telling us that that's what is going to happen.

If you are a renter, all the rental agencies and the FRPO, who are the apartment owners, the tenants' associations, have come to the conclusion that rents will average going up about $300 a year, or about $25 a month for the average renter in Ontario as a result of the HST, because of those things that have to be paid for, the additional costs, whether those costs be gasoline, whether they be electricity, whether they be the guy who comes to plant the flowers in the spring or the auditor who audits the building. All of that will, in the end, be reflected in the rent.

Ordinary people who drive and are forced to drive to work—as most Ontarians are, because the distances are vast—are going to see the gasoline go up that they buy for their car each day.

Even if you're lucky enough to live in a city like Toronto or London—and I know they're having a transit strike, so don't jump all over that—or Hamilton, or places that have transportation—Ottawa—then you know that those costs of getting on that transit system are going to go up. We have seen in the last few days what is happening here in Toronto, with the cost of the tokens going up.

You know, and ordinary people know, what is going to be happening as a result of the HST. We need to hear them, from the full length and breadth, and how it's going to affect them, so that this government in its wisdom can listen and potentially make changes, if not from the opposition, then at least from the people requesting it.

There's one thing I want to close with: This debate is not over. If this government will not hear the people, the people will pass judgment. It won't be now, but it will be in 2011. They will pass judgment and they will remember that when the crunch came and they wanted to be heard, they were not listened to.

If I was a Liberal, if I was a person going door-to-door in the next election, I would be a little reluctant to say, "Give me your vote. Vote for me and I'll listen to you." If that's what you're going to say, I think you're going to have a few doors slammed in your face. "Vote for me and I'll listen to you"; I'm saying that you have to prove today that you're willing to listen, not just at election time but every day.

I have some great hope—and the Premier wouldn't answer this today—because not only does this House have to pass this bill, but the federal House has to pass it too. This is going to be a very, very tough sale in Ottawa. I just wonder whether the government opposite, if they won't listen to the people and they want to ram this through, has a contingency plan. If the Parliament in Ottawa falls as a result of this bill—because I'll tell you, at this particular stage there is only one party that could possibly come to the rescue of the Harper government—and if Mr. Ignatieff continues not to grow a spine and continues to do what he has always done and waffle on issues, then I guess the government could survive. But if he is listening to the people of this province, as surely he must be trying to, then there is not a chance here that this can pass.

I do know that Jack Layton, and I've talked to him about this, and the NDP are opposed to this bill not only here in Ontario but across the country. I do know that in the couple of by-elections that just went by a few weeks ago the NDP actively campaigned, particularly in British Columbia, where there was a by-election taking place, to do away with the HST. It was absolutely successful, and the riding—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. But I also have to say that I expect the Bloc Québécois—and I'm no great supporter of them and their separatist causes—are going to have a real problem supporting this as well because Quebec signed on and didn't get 4.3 billion reasons to do so, and now they are looking for that money. They are looking and saying, "Hey, I think maybe Quebec got ripped off." And what is Mr. Harper going to do in Ottawa? What's he going to do? I don't think he's going to be able to play that game either.

I have to say, I listened to the Minister of Finance when he said that the Conservative government was like rats leaving the ship, because they're backing off on this already. Do they want to put their government at risk? Do they want to see their government fall? Do they want to see all the things that ensue from that and the loss of seats in Ontario and in BC? Do they want to see that? I don't know. I think they're having much colder feet than the members opposite. I think they're more than willing to listen to what the people of this country have to say on this issue and are having some very real second thoughts.

I would ask the members opposite, if you've listened to anything here today, let the people speak. Let them say what they need to say. Let them be heard, not just the people who are in this House but literally everyone across this province who wants to make a deputation. What is at risk? Three weeks? That's what's being contemplated here; 10 cities. I know it's going to be the finance committee that ends up going. I know that I'm going to have to do it, but I am more than willing to listen to those people. I know that my good colleague from Ajax–Pickering, the parliamentary assistant, is more than happy to go and travel the province and listen to this as well, and I do know that other people and other members of this House are interested in hearing what they have to say.

Please let the committee do its work, please let the people of Ontario have their say, and above all else, as legislators, please listen to the people of this province when they speak. The collective wisdom will help to set us in the right direction better than 50 or 100 paid consultants.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I am making an assumption from that that our friends on the government side aren't interested in speaking to this motion, which is rather interesting, because in my two years and change in this Legislature I don't think I've seen a motion as benign as this. This motion simply calls for something that's routinely done at every level, at every ministry, on most bills that are of any kind of controversy at all. My colleague from Nepean–Carleton is simply saying that she would like to see public hearings taken on the road around the province so that people could express their views on what is obviously a very controversial move and a very controversial tax.

1420

Let's get something on the record and very clearly made on my part—I'm not going to do outrage today; I'm simply going to talk about the fact that we're discussing a tax. Taxes are an essential part of the system. They make our system work. The whole thing here is about what is being taxed and when we're going to tax and how we implement a tax, and those things have everything to do with good government. So are we looking at good government? In this case, absolutely we are not. Taxes are not the issue; the will of the people is.

I say to you, Speaker, that during the election of 2007, there was never a discussion of a tax increase. In fact, if we go back to the very beginning of the McGuinty mandate, prior to 2003, there was a clear-cut promise that there would be no raises in taxes, much less any discussion of a tax that affects every man, woman and child in every endeavour of trade that can touch people in a jurisdiction. There was no mandate on the part of this government to implement the HST, and the HST is possibly the most controversial policy the McGuinty government has ever tried to implement. The HST indeed will affect every single Ontarian, every single person who lives in this province, right down to that seven-year-old who will be denied—who knows?—a vacation because mom and dad have to work that much harder to get 8% in the bank that's going to cover a range of services that are not covered today.

It is neither democratic nor accountable on the part of this government to implement this policy without adequate public consultations, and for any member of this government, from the Premier right on down, to suggest that riding association meetings or addresses by the Minister of Revenue to whatever chamber of commerce or board of trade here, there and not everywhere, unfortunately, represent adequate public consultations, is downright insulting.

I want to talk about a couple of things that happened to me over the weekend by way of ad hoc meetings, just to give some idea of how far-ranging this is. I spent the weekend up in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, not by any stretch a riding where I am well-known, but people know enough to have approached me and to have said, "Our member isn't going to take any petition to the government. Our member is not going to represent us on this, so please do what you have to do." I was congratulated for being thrown out of this House last week as a tactic to suggest to the government that I'm protesting, that I am against this tax. I wasn't proud of that particular action, yet I was being congratulated for it.

I can tell you that on Friday, my wife came home from the hairdresser with petitions that were signed in

Eglinton–Lawrence, where that establishment is located. Same thing: "The member from Eglinton–Lawrence isn't going to accept our petitions, isn't going to read our petitions into the record." I suggest that those members who I've mentioned, and every other member who sits in the backbench of the Liberal caucus, the Liberal government, have the same 1,500 or so communications sitting in their office e-mail queue that I have. Those communications don't come to me because I'm a Progressive Conservative; they come to me because I'm a member of provincial Parliament and they come to every member here. Some of you should get the intestinal fortitude to stand up and say to your government, "I have to represent my constituents. I have to read these petitions into the record, and I have to protest." I hope that's going on inside your caucus, because that's the expectation of a majority of people in Ontario, and you know it.

In my own riding of Thornhill, we went to the people. We put full-page ads in papers. We said, "Come to a public meeting. Express your interest, your concern about the harmonized sales tax." When we did that, because it's an open town hall meeting, we knew full well that we could wind up with a hall full of people of varied views. I absolutely expected—and the member from Nepean–Carleton came with me to my own riding. We absolutely expected to have to defend our party's position and to have to listen to people putting forward their support for this measure. We got nary a one. We didn't get one. We had a couple of hundred people in a hall, and I can tell you that to a man, to a woman, they were all against the imposition of this tax at this time. I expect that similar opposition would be found in ridings across this province that are not being well-represented in this House by those members—and you know who you are.

Where are those members of provincial Parliament who represent those ridings? Are you muzzled? I suggest that you are, and I challenge the Liberal MPPs to either state clearly and publicly that they support the HST, that they want to implement it, or that they join our fight against this misguided policy. At least support the notion and the motion that's being discussed this afternoon, of taking this on the road, of going to Brant, for example, and holding public hearings and finding out whether the people of that member's riding are with him or with us. Or maybe they're just people of Ontario who say, "Not this tax at this time." I suggest that's the way it is. You either represent the people of your riding or you represent Dalton McGuinty, who was not elected with this mandate.

The McGuinty government has a track record of broken promises. They're continuing the streak with the HST policy. The accountability in the government—and it's fairly obvious—has been shown through the things we've looked at through the summer of scandal. OLG and the Windsor Energy Centre are examples.

This government promised to manage prudently, yet this month Ontario marked the first anniversary of becoming a have-not province. The Dalton McGuinty government promised that it would not raise taxes, yet within months of taking office they hit taxpayers with the largest tax hike in history, the health tax, and now they are blatantly breaking that promise again.

I stand in this Legislature today to say that I, as a member of this Legislature, cannot represent my constituents adequately in expressing my concern strongly enough, and I would call again on members from the other side to do the same.

It is no longer enough for this government to just tax health; they are now trying to tax every single aspect of a family's life, from the Internet to the phone to fuel to sports, right to the coffin that we're buried in, without holding a single consultation.

This is not a coincidence. One day earlier this year, they woke up and realized that our warnings of a slowing economy, of too much spending, of not preparing Ontario for the tough times, had actually materialized. We were right; not happily so. While they were spending like it was 1999, to coin a phrase, Ontario was losing its manufacturing base and Ontarians were losing their jobs. And the sad part of this is that that's not coming back very soon. It's pretty well gone. I turn toward India and China and Brazil; that's where those jobs have gone. When the Minister of Finance finally looked at the books, he discovered that his government had created the largest deficit our province had ever seen. A year ago, in this very Legislature, we were hearing about a five-point plan that would save us; we were hearing about this horrific $5-billion deficit that we left them—and look at what we have to contend with now.

The only way to get out of the deficit that Dalton McGuinty could come up with was to shove it on to the shoulders of every single person in Ontario, from students to families with children, to seniors, to children who have not even been born yet. So the HST was born in Ontario, and it isn't a very well-planned child. It's the orphan child of Premier McGuinty; unplanned, unparented.

The series of exemptions already introduced by Dalton McGuinty are proof of two things: first, that the Dalton McGuinty government did not think the HST through, and second, that the Dalton McGuinty government bows to well-funded, persistent lobbies.

But the decision to not hold consultations on the HST across the province was thought through. It was a strategic decision. Dalton McGuinty wants to make sure that he is not in the uncomfortable position of having to explain his $3-billion tax grab to Ontarians.

That is why I support this motion and call on all members of this House to do the same.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this House for a long period of time and have watched many bills pass through this Legislature. Rarely has an event taken place, if at all, with regard to a major piece of legislation dealing with a major, major increase in taxation and a shift in taxation—as we're witnessing in this Legislature under Bill 218.

As a former government House leader for three years and having been involved with the procedural affairs committee, as it was then—it's now the Legislative Assembly committee—I have often said that government doesn't do themselves any favours by trying to be devious with regard to bringing forward a piece of legislation and hoping that the public will not come to their senses, that it will be over with before they wake up and therefore this is the best route that we should follow.

I want to bring up a few points that haven't been raised in the debate with regard to this particular need for public consultations. First of all, all of the debate has surrounded the HST, which of course is the most important part of the legislation in Bill 218. The government wants to do the public hearings—four hours, I believe—all in the city of Toronto and not allow anybody else from across Ontario. Eastern Ontario, the area which I represent, will have no say with regard to their views about this particular new increase in taxation.

I was looking through Bill 218, and actually there are over 21 different pieces of legislation affected by Bill 218. There's the Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act; there's the Architects Act; there's the Commodity Futures Act; there's the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act; there's the Condominium Act; there's the Co-operative Corporations Act; there's the Corporations Tax Act; there's the Education Act; there's the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act; there's the Financial Administration Act—and it goes on and it goes on and it goes on. One has to wonder, if somebody doesn't want to speak about the HST but wants to speak about one of the other 20 pieces of legislation that are altered in this act, how on earth are they going to get an opportunity to bring to the Legislature their view with regard to any of those other pieces of legislation? This is not only a huge bill with regard to taxation, but it's a huge bill with regard to a bunch of other pieces of legislation. The call for public hearings is buttressed or strengthened by the fact that this is an omnibus bill affecting many people. The engineers are involved in here; the architects are involved in here etc. etc. As well, there are some other significant parts to this act.

This government is doing two things in this act, outside of the HST, that are important. One is giving the authorization to the crown to borrow $15.1 billion more than they ever have in the past. I believe that this should evoke a debate, not only in this Legislature but outside this Legislature, in public hearings, about the debt that this government has piled up for the public during their term since 2003. When the McGuinty government came to power in 2003, the debt of this province was $130 billion. When they leave in 2011, which I predict will probably happen, that debt is probably going to be increased by about $100 billion. They're going to take the debt from $130 billion to $230 billion. What that does is put on our kids, our grandkids and future generations of the province of Ontario the job of carrying and paying off that debt as we go forward.

One hundred billion dollars worth of new debt means that instead of carrying our debt for somewhere around $10 billion a year, it's probably going to cost us closer to $17 billion or $18 billion a year to carry as we go into the future. That means they have taken about $8 billion a year out of the spending power of governments going forward. That means $8 billion a year less for health care, $8 billion a year less for education resources, $8 billion a year less for services that the provincial government, the next government and governments thereafter will be hamstrung in terms of providing adequate services for the citizens of Ontario.

I believe that part of legislation should have a great deal of focus. I think we should have economists coming in and talking about the amount of debt we can sustain in our province going forward. But we'll need extensive public hearings not only to deal with the HST but with the debt issue.

As well, there's another important part of this legislation, and that deals with the fact that in November the government is effectively seeking supply for the first part of next year. They're giving themselves the first tranche of money they need to spend from April 1 on to be able to write cheques. Well, in days past, government usually did this about two weeks before the time span when they needed to have the money and authorization to write cheques to pay public servants and pay the bills they had.

So I am very much concerned at the fact that in this act we are now not only doing the HST and not only giving authorization to borrow more, but we're also setting ourselves up in the future, without having to come to Parliament when the time is really more appropriate, when we're closer to the time when that money is going to be spent.

I don't believe we have a quorum, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is there a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Interjections.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to count and speak at the same time. I just wanted to be sure that enough members of the government were here to heed these wise words. When you have a caucus of 72, I guess you should be able to have a dozen in here anyway.

Interjection.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yes, I did.

So I wanted to make that point with regard to Bill 218. In summary, not only do we have the concern about the HST, but we have concerns about other parts of legislation in the omnibus bill that Bill 218 is.

As well, I wanted to briefly talk about some of the income tax changes in this piece of legislation. While the government is saying they are going to lower the rate of taxation on the first $37,000 of income, they also have slipped something else into the act that they didn't really talk about before. In Ontario, there is a surtax of 20% on individuals who are now paying in excess of $4,257 in

tax. What they've done is, in order to not give those people a break because of the other tax change, they've lowered that threshold to about $4,000. What they're doing is, on the one hand they're giving and on the other hand they taketh away with regard to the individuals who are paying this degree of spending. I don't think many people recognize that.

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Lastly, I just want to make one comment with regard to the agreement with Canada with regard to this HST, and that is, it's clear in the agreement that Ontario only has to have Bill 218 passed by March 31 of 2010. We are returning here in mid-February for three or four weeks. The government can easily pass the legislation at that time. So the whole notion that we have to have this legislation passed by the end of this session, or by Christmastime, when we rise before our February session, is bogus. All we have to do is pass this legislation by March 31, 2010. That would leave not only the time between now and Christmas for public hearings, but we could have public hearings all through January and the first part of February as well, and let all the people of Ontario have the opportunity to speak their minds with regard to not only the HST but the other matters contained in Bill 218.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Last week the McGuinty Liberals introduced Bill 218 to push forward on implementing their HST. The McGuinty Liberals are planning on pushing this bill through before the House rises, with minimal debate and without the opportunity for province-wide public consultations. This is appalling. The HST is the largest tax grab in Ontario history, and this government is trying to eliminate our democratic process which gives the public the right to express their concerns and opinions. That in itself speaks volumes.

This is a government that likes to boast about transparency, yet here they are, trying to rush a bill through with as little input and information as possible from the people who elected them.

The hard-working people of this province will suffer the consequences once this tax is implemented, come July 1, 2010. It will be Ontarians who have to figure out how to pay the bills in these already difficult times.

Although the McGuinty Liberals say that Ontarians can voice their opinions, by that time—the next election—it will be too late. By the time the next election rolls around, we will be legally locked into paying the HST for five years.

Ontarians are very concerned about the impact of the HST because it will have very drastic effects on their daily household finances. Let me give you some examples. Come July 1, if the Premier has his way and rams this piece of legislation through, the average family of four can expect to pay approximately $2,500 more a year.

The price increase on gas alone shows the financial burden of the HST on Ontarians. For example, if gas is priced at $1, a Toyota Camry Solara would cost about $70 a week to fill up. That's just over $3,600 a year. With an additional 8% due to HST, we're looking at an increase of almost $300 just for one vehicle. I think we can say that most families have more than one vehicle, so it could be $600 or even $900 more a year.

What about home Internet? Say the average Ontario family pays $60 a month. That's about $720 a year. With HST, add another $10 for related taxes and fees, and this brings the overall cost to $840. That's almost $70 more a year for home Internet.

Mutual funds: There's another service that will be affected. Let's say an average family of four has worked hard, saved hard over the years and made their sacrifices. Unlike the McGuinty Liberals, this family has been fiscally responsible. They were smart with their finances in the good years and planned for the bad years, unlike this government, who left the cupboards bare and dry and threw Ontario into the largest deficit in our history. This family has $100,000 in savings invested in mutual funds. According to a September 30 Globe and Mail article, the HST will cost Ontarians $325 annually of their hard-earned and well-saved money.

What about haircuts? Yes, that too will be hit with HST. Let's say the average family spends $850 a year on haircuts. Add an additional 8%: That's $68 more. The list goes on and on, and suddenly the average family is looking at about $2,500 less in their pockets every year.

I will add to this that the McGuinty Liberals have tried to sell this $3-billion tax grab by telling Ontarians they will qualify for a rebate. Okay. This family of four will be eligible for $1,000 of a one-time rebate; singles can qualify for $300. That would leave a family on the hook for well over $1,000. Neither this little bribe nor any other trick will help the McGuinty Liberals sell this tax grab. Ontarians know full well that the rebate is a one-time deal and doesn't cover the increased costs.

Another trick that the McGuinty Liberals have brought forward in order to try to sell this is to exempt fast food under $4 and newspaper subscriptions. They made that announcement two weeks ago. Well, I must say that I have some concern with this announcement since the McGuinty Liberals seem to be prioritizing exempting fast food and not things like gym memberships, golf fees or recreation fees for ice time, local arenas and soccer fields. This is of great concern because this government also has a mandate for health promotion, and if they are more focused on exempting fast food from the HST than healthy lifestyle costs, what message are we to get from this? This doesn't make any sense.

There will be no chance for Ontarians to express their concerns about this exemption or the proposed other exemptions because there are no province-wide public consultations.

I want to take a bit of time to talk about the effect this will have on municipalities. In estimates committee we questioned Minister Watson for almost 15 hours, and I asked the minister several questions on the HST. This is the minister who represents the interests of municipalities, yet he felt that he was not obligated to discuss the HST because, of course, it falls under the finance

ministry. My question was, why are municipalities only being rebated 78% on the HST when the federal government rebates 100% on their GST? I asked the minister how they came to this figure. He did not know, but he said that he was confident that it would "keep the sector whole." Well, the sector doesn't believe that. They are facing budget shortfalls and they will have to raise taxes, property taxes, in order to cover the HST.

We have a problem. The McGuinty Liberals are trying to push the bill through. Simply put, it is the wrong time for this tax, and no matter what the Premier and his HST minister say and what they try to spin, this isn't going to work. The McGuinty Liberals have to move immediately to delay passing of the bill until they have engaged in a full, province-wide public consultation. That is how democracy works.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's rather interesting that the government decides not to dirty their hands in this debate—my God. "Why participate in the democratic process?" I'd ask myself if I were a government member. "It's just the pesky opposition trying to raise a point in regard to this particular HST legislation." Why deign to participate in this debate, or in any debate, with us, the loyal opposition in the third party? Why would the government want to do that? I think it's complete arrogance that the government will not engage in debate about this particular opposition day motion. I think it speaks volumes about where this government is coming from.

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Listen, there is nothing more basic. If you take the time to read Montpetit or Beauchesne's or Erskine May, one of the things that is really clear as you go through the precedents is that public hearings were really designed as an opportunity for the public to have its say when it came to how taxes would be imposed on the citizen. It says within there—and I'm not going to read it verbatim, but what it says in Montpetit and in Beauchesne's is that the government is expected to give a certain latitude and importance to committee hearings when it comes to the issue of taxation. What could be more basic than a complete shift in taxation in the province of Ontario when it comes to consumption taxes? For years, Ontario has operated under the system of the Ontario provincial sales tax. We have levied our own provincial sales tax on consumables in this province—not services, but consumables—and we have seen fit to exempt certain products and certain individuals from having to pay that tax because we thought, by way of good government and taxation policy, that was necessary.

For example, where I come from, there's something called the point-of-sale exemption, which says to First Nations that if you come in and buy some sort of goods from a store, you have a point-of-sale exemption by showing your status card and you don't have to pay the PST. Why? Because that was one of the obligations under treaty when we signed Treaty 9 and others: that in exchange for us, the Europeans, getting control of the land, the First Nations would not have to pay our tax. That was one of the bases by which First Nations allowed us, the settlers, to use the lands that are now called Ontario and the rest of Canada.

This government flies in the face of that, and I'm laughing because I find it extremely laughable that the government would say, "Well, you know, to heck with the history of Canada. To heck with the history of Ontario. To heck with the agreements that we made with First Nations. We will not deal with the point-of-sale exemption. We'll give that responsibility to the federal government," knowing full well that the GST doesn't have a point-of-sale exemption.

When you take a look at other people who are going to have to pay this tax—go talk to your local realtors and find out how enamoured they are with this tax. If you go out to buy a house after this, you're going to have to pay taxes for things that you never thought you would have to pay taxes for. Your lawyer's bill: The lawyer now charges you a percentage, a very small percentage, to process your mortgage. That is going to be taxable now because the GST applies to those services, but the PST doesn't. For a whole raft of other services when it comes to the transfer of the home, you're going to have to pay PST where you never had to before. So the government is giving the federal government the taxation policies that used to rest here in the province of Ontario.

What is really galling is that they won't even participate in the debate. The government's going to say, "Oh, we'll have lots of time for debate. As a matter of fact, right after opposition day, we're going to get into a discussion in regards to the bill itself by entering into second reading. But, oh, we're not going to dirty our hands and fingers by being involved in a pesky opposition day. After all, we are a government. We have the right and the ability to pass anything we want, and we don't have to listen to that pesky opposition. My God, get them out of the way."

There's a thing called democracy. In a parliamentary system, it says that yes, the government at the end is going to get its bill, but the opposition has an opportunity to scrutinize, and more importantly, the public has an opportunity to scrutinize through us. That's why we're calling on the government to have some public hearings. But never mind agreeing to the public hearings; they won't even agree to debate us. I think it's galling. Their strategy is not to speak for 40 minutes so that they can kill 40 minutes during opposition day, so they can add 40 minutes to their debate on the actual bill. And to do what? So they can run six and a half hours to give us time allocation.

We know what their strategy is. It's so simple. But my God, is it hard? Is it hard to do those types of things? Is the government House leader showing us great strategy? I'm sure that Monique Smith, my good friend, is going to the government caucus meetings and saying, "Oh, I'm so smart. I figured out how we can get all our bills by the end of the session," and she laid out a strategy of making sure that we talk things out for six and a half hours. Then

she brings in her time allocation motion and basically shuts it down by time allocation. Well, she ain't too bright; it's in the standing orders. The standing orders in this place have been changed to the point that the opposition barely has an opportunity to hold the government to scrutiny.

What is really galling is what you're doing to the public of Ontario. You won't even participate in this debate, and then you won't allow public hearings to happen on a bill that you say you're so proud of. I say to you, if you're proud of the bill and you think it's such a winner out there, why are you afraid to go out to public hearings? Why don't you allow the bill to go to a few communities across Ontario and hear what the people have to say? There are going to be some, yes, who are going to be opposed, but you might even get some who are in favour, because I'm sure the Liberals can scare up some family relatives somewhere in a riding to come and—when I was in government, it was always good to get my dad out. My dad would always say good things about me, as would my cousins and my aunts and my uncles. You know, that theory has been done before; that practice has been done before. I'm sure you can find somebody. But the really galling part—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, maybe not your cousins.

But the point that the government is not prepared for the public to have its say about this bill, I think, speaks volumes. I say again, I listened to the Minister of Finance and I listened to the Minister of Revenue and others stand in this place and say, "Oh, this is the best thing since sliced bread; this is going to make the Ontario economy boom. This is wonderful. This is great. This is sliced cheese." They bring out these quotes from different people who say, "Oh, the best thing in the world that ever happened, the best thing in the universe to ever happen, has been done by this Liberal government when it comes to this particular measure."

Well, if you're so proud, let the public have its say. You know, there is a little thing called democracy in this country. We're sending our soldiers to Afghanistan, some 3,000-plus, and we're asking our soldiers from across this country to go into a country like Afghanistan so that the citizens of Afghanistan can have an ability to participate in a thing called democracy. Well, if we don't practise democracy on this side, what does it say to the people who are on the other side looking at Canadian soldiers and others who are supposedly there to defend democracy? I'm sure they're not tuned in to the legislative channel, but my point is, it is hypocritical for us to say as legislators that we believe in democracy when we are not prepared to basically follow those principles of democracy and allow the public to have its say.

So I say to the government across the way, it's a pretty sad day that, first, you will not participate in debate at an opposition day because you figure you can get an extra 40 minutes on your bill; then, secondly, you will not allow for people to go to committee—and I'm not talking about just here in Toronto, but allowing places such as Windsor, London, Sudbury or Timmins or wherever it might be to have their say when it comes to being able to talk on this particular initiative.

So we say to the government, we see what you are up to, and you might think you're clever, but I don't think it's very smart. I think in the end the public is infinitely more wise than we give them credit for sometimes in this place. I think the public gets it. They understand. At the end of the day, the government is utilizing its majority to railroad through this House a bill that a lot of Ontarians are not happy with. In fact, the polling numbers indicate that a majority of Ontarians are not in favour of this particular proposition. So I say to the government across the way, if you think it's all that great, then you should have the courage to send it into committee.

I say to you, we know what you are up to. Again, on this opposition day, you are deciding not to speak. You're doing so because you believe in the end that if you don't speak for the 40 minutes you have today, you'll get more time on your bill. My response to you is simply this—I have a response, Mr. Speaker, and my response is, I move adjournment of this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bisson has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1458 to 1528.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bisson has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please stand and remain standing to be counted by the Clerk.

Take your seats, please.

All those opposed, please stand and remain standing to be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 41; the nays are 18.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND SAFETY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT AUX NORMES TECHNIQUES ET À LA SÉCURITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act,

2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 187, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes techniques et la sécurité et la Loi de 1996 sur l'application de certaines lois traitant de sécurité et de services aux consommateurs.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was just looking through the standing orders and am looking for clarification of standing order 43(c), I believe, with respect to opposition day and the fact that on a Monday it is limited to two hours and, as 43(c) reads, the Speaker will put the question without further debate and a recorded vote is requested. Can you clarify why we're not having a vote on that motion?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It's very simple: The debate was adjourned.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The debate was adjourned. There's nothing more to decide.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further explanation: The debate was not completed, as you are quoting in the standing orders, so it was adjourned. We didn't reach the point of the debate being completed, is the way I would explain it.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 19—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 19, 2009, I am now required to put the question: On October 20, Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of Bill 187, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 and the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, 1996.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1532 to 1537.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. Members take their seats, please.

Mr. McMeekin has moved second reading of Bill 187. All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gravelle, Michael	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Johnson, Rick	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Chan, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Sousa, Charles
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Paul	
Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hillier, Randy	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 43; the nays are 16.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 19, 2009, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 21(c), I've provided you with written notice of a point of privilege I wish to raise in the House this afternoon outlining how Bill 218, which will apply sales taxes to a range of goods and services—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. The member filed notice of this point of privilege at 3:12; the first opportunity at which she may raise it is 4:15.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, then, Mr. Speaker: On, December 2, 2008, the member from Oxford submitted the following order paper question: "Would the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs please provide the amount of the average payment per farm under the Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture program and provide the dollar figures for the top 10% of cheques issued and the bottom 10% of cheques issued."

Standing order 99(d) reads as follows: "The minister shall answer such written questions within 24 sessional days, unless he or she indicates that more time is required because the answer will be costly or time consuming or that he or she declines to answer, in which case a notation shall be made on the Orders and Notices paper following"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat. According to the records of the table, Mr. Hardeman does not have an outstanding question on the order paper.

Mr. Ted Arnott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe I do have a valid point of order. On April 8, 2008, more than 18 months ago, the current leader of the official opposition, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, as he was then, submitted the following order paper question with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: "Provide a list of all successful applicants to the advanced manufacturing investment strategy program for all fiscal years this program has existed and

include: the name of the business; its location; a brief description of the project; the value of the loan; terms of loan repayment including the interest rate, annual repayments and the length of repayment; and how many jobs the project will create or save." As you know—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, please take your seat. According to the records we have, Mr. Hudak does not have an outstanding question on the order paper.

Mr. Robert Bailey: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: On April 17, 2008—that's more than 18 months ago—the current leader of the official opposition, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, as he was then, submitted the following order paper question: "Would the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal provide a list of all advertising and other promotional materials of the LCBO"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat. Apparently, according to the records, the member, Mr. Hudak, has questions on an interim basis, and therefore you don't have a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: On September 28, 2009, the member for Simcoe–Grey submitted the following order paper question: "Would the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care provide the number of physicians in short supply in the following municipalities: New Tecumseth, Adjala-Tosorontio, Essa, Clearview, Springwater, Wasaga Beach, Collingwood and The Town of The Blue Mountains."

Standing order 99(d) reads as follows: "The minister shall answer such written questions within 24 sessional days, unless he or she indicates that more time is required because the answer will be costly or time consuming or that he or she declines to answer, in which case a notation shall be made on the Orders and Notices paper following the question indicating that the minister has made an interim answer, the approximate date that the information will be available, or that the minister has declined to answer, as the case may be." Today is the 24th sessional day, and the standing order is quite clear that the response must be provided within 24 sessional days. I know that they have changed ministers several times—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. You do have a valid point of order. I am going to encourage the government and the ministers to answer as quickly as possible.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In response to the point of order that was raised by my colleague and that I'm sure will be raised by my next colleague, we will undertake to provide answers to the questions that have been tabled in a timely manner. You will note that most of them have been responded to. I believe there are only four or five that are outstanding at this point.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: According to standing order 99(d), on June 2, 2009, the member for Simcoe North submitted the following order paper question:

"Would the Attorney General advise as to the amount received in the victim justice fund each year from 2004 to 2008 and provide the list of grant recipients from the victim justice fund for each of the said years, including"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. According to the records, the only question outstanding was the one that I ruled on just previously. There are no other questions outstanding on the order paper.

M^me^ France Gélinas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today on a point of order with regard to a committee and this House's ability to call witnesses.

Recently, during a public accounts review of the auditor's special report on the electronic health records initiative, there were some questions raised about the committee's authority to call witnesses and exactly who could be called to appear. On October 28, a government member of the committee raised concerns on which individual the committee had the right to call forward. The member for Guelph advanced that—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat, please. This is a committee matter; it's an internal matter with the committee. If the committee wishes to report to the House, the matter will be dealt with then.

Mr. Peter Shurman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: On September 28, 2009, the member from Simcoe–Grey submitted the following order paper question:

"Would the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure explain if the government has a strategy to move all of Ontario's apartment and condominium units to individual"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Thornhill, take your seat, please. I just advised the House that there is only one question on the order paper that's outstanding. I think we should move on.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: We have been having a lot of discussion about the point of order, being that the question that's on the order paper is to be answered. There is a long process in the standing orders that deals with if they provide an interim answer and then provide a final answer. The one that was referred to earlier was in fact a question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food relating to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oxford, take your seat, please. I've ruled on that. I have advised or suggested that the government answer those questions, even if they were replies that it's going to take longer, and that they do that as expeditiously at possible.

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 19, 2009 on the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An

Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The order has already been called. Further debate.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to enter into the lead-off debate on second reading for Bill 218. When last we had this matter before us, the Minister of Finance indicated that he would be sharing his time with me as his parliamentary assistant. It's certainly my intention to use the time allocated for the purposes of debate in respect of Bill 218.

I want to take a few minutes to follow up on some of the comments that the minister outlined himself, some additional legislative changes that come with Bill 218, the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009, which will benefit Ontarians broadly.

1550

I also want to obviously take the opportunity, in addition to the assistance I've had in the preparation of some notes through very able staff, to provide some commentary in addition to those notes. I'm sure that members will be pleased to know that our allocated time will be used this afternoon—I'm going to just ask the page if I could get some water, because I'll probably need some along the way.

I want to start first, because I think that one of the things that has been missing, in part, during the discussion around matters related to Bill 218, and particularly the HST, and that has been missing in some of the dialogue of late, are some of the actual experiences where an HST, a value-added tax, has been put in place in other jurisdictions within Canada. I think it's important, as much as possible for the public who pay attention to what is happening here in the Legislature, or who pick it up either directly or through Hansard, to have an opportunity to see what experiences have occurred elsewhere, in addition to the debate that happens here on both sides of the issue, and to hear from businesses and people about some of the things that have actually occurred.

I want to draw attention to an article in the National Post on November 19, just last week. The heading is "Ontario, BC to Benefit by $7B with HST. 'One less Irritant.'" It's by Paul Vieira. The point I want to make from the article—I'm going to quote from it if I could, in particular because it does deal with the owner of a company in Newfoundland, a province that has had a single value-added tax, an HST, since 1997.

Let me read from the article. It starts:

"Newfoundlander Lorne Janes can't figure out what all the fuss is about in Ontario and British Columbia over the introduction of a harmonized sales tax.

"The owner of St. John's based Continental Marble of Canada Ltd. said the introduction of the HST in his province in 1997 alleviated plenty of headaches dealing with 'convoluted' tax rules—such as figuring out whether or not masking tape was tax-exempt and filling out myriad forms to get cash back."

I'm going to skip a little bit as I go through this; I'm not going to read the entire article, but I do want to reference parts of it and draw on the experience of a business owner in Newfoundland when an HST was applied in that province in 1997.

If I could go on in the article:

"The harmonized tax also meant Mr. Janes no longer had to pay tax on inputs ranging from machinery that cut pieces of marble and granite to buffing cloths that gave finished countertops a nice shine.

"The money saved helped Mr. Janes lower the price on his products to help him compete with low-cost Asian imports."

I'll stop quoting at that point, because I want to go back to the content of that. This is speaking about the tax input. It's talking about things as significant as machinery, which each of us often won't identify with, and the capital cost of that. But I think that each of us can probably more readily identify with buffing cloths that might be used by any worker on the floor in preparing granite for sale. Each of those resulted in a cost saving to Mr. James and his business and resulted, as he says, in the capacity to lower prices on his product and helped him compete with low-cost Asian imports.

If I could quote from the article again:

"He was also able to expand Continental Marble's foreign reach, as sales for exports are HST-exempt. Previously, they weren't, and his firm was forced to file documents with Ottawa to get the money back—something he often didn't bother with because of the time involved.

"'It is one less irritant that I don't have to deal with,'" Mr. Janes says. "'Instead I can focus more on being competitive and maintaining jobs.'"

Again, to diverge from the content of this article, you see that he's speaking to the matter of export. It's an important element of the debate that we haven't been having. We've certainly been having a conversation, a debate, over a period of time in this place, in part about the impact on consumers. We really haven't talked yet about the impact on our capacity to compete externally: on the ability to export products and on the efficiency this will provide in businesses wanting to do business abroad.

If we are to be an export jurisdiction in Ontario, and to continue to be in an effective way, this is a big part of what is going to help us do that. How long ago were we speaking about the importance of the automotive industry in this province? We'll continue and have that debate on an ongoing basis, I'm sure. But we in this place know that the vast majority of the products we produce here in Ontario are exported abroad, primarily to the US. Mr. Janes, in his experience in Newfoundland, clearly found that his capacity to export his product was enhanced with the introduction of an HST, as was his ability to create jobs and lower his prices on products. That's very much what we're trying to talk about. It's very much the message that we are trying to get out to people. In the longer term, the prospects of the HST are really about

creating a competitive economy here in Ontario, the creation of new jobs and building business.

If I can go back to the article itself and resume with a quote: "It is estimated that companies in Ontario and BC stand to save nearly $7 billion a year in the cost of doing business once the HST is introduced in July 2010, economists at Toronto-Dominion Bank say. That money, business leaders and economists argue, will be poured back into the economy, through lower prices for consumers and the resulting job creation as firms reinvest in their capital stock."

Again, it's a point that we've been making and it's good to see it being made in other places, throughout the jurisdictions, as well: that economists throughout this country who are recognized by all of us, on all sides of the House, have been speaking to the importance of taking these kinds of moves in order to have a more competitive tax environment and to make tax changes in this country in a variety of ways—including, in this instance, the introduction of the value-added tax in the form of the HST.

I want to speak to the article just briefly again in the time available, and I'm going to go on to part of it. "Jayson Myers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters says.... 'It is very clear coming out of this recession that it can't be business as usual. For us to recover and restore the jobs lost, we have to put in place a strategy for economic growth. The HST is not an attractive political move, but it is an important part of the economic puzzle.'" That really wraps up the article.

I want to speak to that last little bit again, if I can. These are the exporters and manufacturers here in this country speaking to the importance of moves of this nature. He's speaking to the need to be able to continue recovering and restoring the jobs that were lost and to put new jobs in place. We have to have a strategy to do that.

"The HST," he says, "is not an attractive political move." I don't think there are too many people in this room who think that doing an HST is an easy sell. I know on our side we don't, and certainly the Premier has been clear that this is not an easy choice to make in the context of an easy political agenda. But our job is to, as much as we can, educate people during the period of time between now and its implementation—subject to this legislation getting passed and being formally put in place, but being a little presumptive, if that does occur. There's certainly time available for all of us to continue this process of educating the people of Ontario about the objectives, the long-term benefits and, frankly, some of the downsides and issues being raised in this Legislature about the direct costs that may occur to individuals or families; some of the opportunities to offset those and some of the things that, frankly, won't be offset as a result of the legislation, but are necessary for long-term economic prosperity, growth and opportunities in the province.

I, for one, have been saying for many months now, in my own way when the issue is raised, that this really is about what's going to happen in the future in this province. I have said that, like Mr. Myers said—not his words, mine, but they are very similar—when we come out of this economic quagmire, as we move out of this deep recession that now appears, at the very least, to have some light at the end of the tunnel—depending on what day you're looking at the media and what reports you're reading, but certainly looking a lot different than it even did eight or 10 months ago—when we come out of this, we can't afford to be standing still. We can't afford to be treading water. We can't afford to be in a non-competitive environment. It's necessary for us to take the actions that are being taken so that we are in a competitive position, in Ontario, to compete with jurisdictions within this country, with our neighbours to the south and internationally. This is a fundamental part of what we need to do to provide for future economic growth, for jobs and ultimately for our children, our grandchildren and those who are out of work today, but looking longer-term, for this economy and this province.

1600

It's no surprise that Jack Mintz, in his work in the report that was just released, projects that some 600,000 jobs, give or take a few thousand, will be created over a period of 10 years. This is a significant number of job opportunities here in the province over time. We don't expect them all to happen today. The numbers—they were 590,000. We don't expect them all to happen today, but over time these are significant net job increases that are going to occur in this province, quite frankly, as a result of, in large measure, the introduction of these tax reforms.

As I go through the time that we have available to us this afternoon, I want to talk not only about the HST and the implications from a job creation standpoint, but I hope I have the opportunity in the time available to talk a little bit as well about some of the implications for families and individuals of income tax changes that are occurring on a permanent basis, if not to speak specifically to some opportunities that will be there for those of probably lower, more moderate incomes and those on fixed incomes—at a lower level, aspects of increases in their tax credits, whether it's as a result of sales tax issues or property tax issues, and ways in which we are putting measures in place that will provide additional protections for those who are more vulnerable in our community.

I think it's fair to say that it has been a hallmark of this government, this party, over the past six years in office that we have paid attention to the needs of those who are vulnerable. Not all of the needs can be met, and I'll be the first to speak to that, as have others in this place. We're not going to meet all of those needs. Governments can't do that. But to a large measure we've paid attention to those needs, and in doing this particular tax reform package as a package, we've also paid attention during that time frame to the needs of those who are most vulnerable, those who are vulnerable within our communities, those who don't necessarily have some of the means that folks like the members here might have, or others who have secure jobs in this economy.

I said when I started that I was pleased to rise and speak to this matter. I think earlier today, one or more of

the members, whether it was during question period or the debate that just preceded this on the motion—I was looking for members who would stand up and say that they support the introduction of a harmonized sales tax and a tax reform package, and I'd be one of those. I've been saying for some many months now that I think this is the right thing for us to do at this time as a plan for the economic future of this province. That's the important aspect.

Yes, it's not an easy thing to do. I walked into a restaurant over the weekend and saw a couple of constituents I've known for years and years. They were great supporters in my capacity in municipal government and they have supported me provincially. They are seniors. I walked over and we had a chat, and the fellow whispered in my ear, "I really don't like the HST very much." I said, "I can appreciate that. I can understand that at this point in time, with the information you've been given"—we didn't have a long conversation, but, "I can understand, with the time you've been given, that you don't have all the information, and there will be some impacts when you do certain things. But you probably haven't yet had a chance to look and see whether or not the income tax reductions that are going to be put in place will impact you. I suspect they will." I don't know whether or not the seniors' tax benefits will impact them directly, but they might very well. But I said to him what I just said here: "I understand your concern, but this really is about the future of this province and coming out of recession and growing this economy and providing for our children and our grandchildren." I got a nod of acknowledgement in that sense and a positive smile, and we continued our conversation.

He made his point that they've got concerns about how it might impact them as individuals within the context of their fiscal environment, but he also understood at least in part, in the short time we had, why I, as one member, feel it's a necessary and important part of the tax reform package for the future of this province. Quite frankly, I think it will stand me in good stead with them. I think that as they have time to look at this and consider it, look at the direct impacts on them, look at the offsets that are going to occur in both the short and long terms, and give consideration to the future economy of this province, they will understand the need, and, to a large extent, they will come to accept the decisions that are being made—maybe begrudgingly. As the newspaper article I referred to said, this is not an easy sell, but I think they will come to that conclusion along the way, because they are reasonable people. They are reasonable in the context of understanding their own needs, and they are also reasonable in the context of understanding that governments need to act, that we are in and have been in a very serious economic situation.

I think the Premier put it well one day when we were speaking collectively—not just one on one—in talking about: The people of Ontario expect their governments to do something. They certainly don't expect them to stand still in the middle of an economic calamity. They don't expect the government just to just tread water. They may not always like the choices, but we have to make—as best we can—reasoned choices with all the information available to us, and, making those choices, to move forward on them and explain to the best of our ability what those are about.

We know that in the business context—and I've mentioned some of it in this article, in a generic sense of somebody who has actually experienced it—but in a more technical sense, we know that this package that has been put together will impact business in a positive sense. That will drive the opportunity to sell products and services, retain people, hire people and grow businesses. That is the sequence of events one expects and one of the sequence of events that will occur over time.

It is anticipated that the HST in itself would result in the removal of about $4.5 billion a year in embedded taxes—taxes built into the system, freeing those dollars up for other uses, immediately within the context of the business environment. Each time a product is moved along a stream, if it's a manufactured product, it is moved from one point of production to another to sale. It would take that out and provide those monies for other functions early on.

Currently, those embedded taxes are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices at the cash register, where the item is taxed yet again with the PST. This strategy will see the removal of those embedded taxations and the inclusion of the taxation as it currently is at the point of sale. I think the biggest impact that we are likely to see—and the ones often being drawn to our attention—are on some service functions. Some service functions that might not currently attract a PST will attract that portion onto the HST, and that creates its own challenges along the way.

Studies have been done examining the experiences of the three Atlantic provinces, not just Newfoundland. The one article and the one particular company I was referring to in that article—but if you think of that in the context of all the provinces and the work that was done after they harmonized their taxes and say that it was one example of this bigger picture within those provinces—the experience of the three Atlantic provinces that harmonized their RSTs with the GSTs in 1997 found that cost savings were rapidly passed through to consumers. It didn't take years; it took a relatively short period of time for those cost savings to work their way into the system, because businesses wanted to be competitive, they wanted to sell their products and services, so they had to take those costs out if they were going to compete with other providers of services and products.

A recent study by the TD Bank estimates that 80% of the costs savings would be passed through to consumers by the end of the first year, the point being, we're not going to have to wait forever to see those monies flowing back through the system in real savings, real reduced costs on that end to the consumers. The TD has estimated that 95% of those cost savings would be passed through by the third year.

So there's a bit of transition. In fact, it's one of the reasons—and I don't know whether we had these specific numbers available to us at that time; I somehow don't think so; we had the experience that was going on in those three provinces—for the negotiations with the federal government on transitional funding, because it will take a period of time. I can suggest from these comments in this TD report that it will take a period of up to three years for 95% to flow through and a period of the first year for about 80% to flow through. So during that time, we negotiated with the federal government for transitional payments, to a large extent to be provided to families and individuals during a time when they're paying some additional RST on services that they wouldn't have paid it on, or PST they wouldn't have paid it on. We'll be providing, through the negotiations, a payment to those individuals and families that would offset some, if not all, of those costs, depending upon the amount of money that one might be expending. Obviously, the more money you have available to you, the larger your expenditures are, the more money you're going to be paying out. But for the average family, I would suggest, this will go a very long way to offset any negative impact that might occur.

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The TD study makes this notation: "In order for businesses to generate an increase in demand for their products they will have to pass those savings on to consumers." That seems pretty obvious in our discussion here. Again, I think it's valuable to put it on the record in the form of those who are in the business of analyzing the economy, put it on the record to speak to the fact that for businesses to generate an increase in demand for products, you'll have to pass the savings on. They're not going to be able to keep those savings that they get from the tax inputs and put them in their pocket and keep it on the positive side of the ledger sheet as just an additional piece of the profit margin. The only way they're going to remain competitive, the only way they're going to get demand for their products to increase, is if they pass those savings on to the consumer. And the sooner they do that, quite frankly, the better it will be for their businesses.

I think that's obviously good news for Ontario businesses, but I would suggest equally that it's good news for Ontario consumers because over time it will become clearer and clearer to Ontarians what they're paying tax for and what they're paying for on the product. If you include the embedded tax in the product, you're not really getting a true price; you're getting a price with a tax in, and a tax in, and a tax in, and another tax at the end. At least with the HST, over time you'll begin to see the real cost of that product—a better comparator than you might have today—as well as a single sales tax at the end of the day, not two as we currently have.

I mentioned the transitional funding as the cost savings are built into the system. The provisions that have been put in place will provide for $1,000 for families during that first year, and my recollection is that it's going to be in three payments, staggered over that period of time, and obviously in the year in which it's being implemented as the appropriate year in which to do that. If my recollection is off—and I just don't have all of the detailed notes in front of me. I think my recollection is pretty accurate. Families under $160,000 would be eligible for that rebate, and individuals would be eligible for a rebate up to $300. I believe the ceiling is $80,000, but again, I would stand to be corrected if that number is not quite accurate. The point is, it's a fairly sizable payment to Ontarians to offset the implications of the HST in the early going, to both families and individuals across a fairly broad spectrum of income.

That is transitional funding. It's not permanent, annual funding. It's paid out one time in instalments over the course of that first year. It's to ensure, to a very large extent, as the system gets itself geared up and as cost savings begin to flow through the system, that Ontario families are kept whole.

There are some other interesting aspects to it that have less to do with individual consumers and more to do with some of the organizations that we work with on an ongoing basis—not just as government, but as communities. Charities, as an example, would be able to claim rebates of 82% on HST inputs; municipalities, universities and colleges would be able to claim rebates of 78%; hospitals, to claim rebates of 87%; and school boards would be able to claim rebates of 93%.

The point of those rebates on those very specific types of broader public service organizations and charities is to keep them whole. In the context of charities, obviously you want them to be able to retain as many of the dollars as possible to be able to use them in the function for which they're raising them. For municipalities, as our partners, and colleges and universities, you want to ensure that the tax dollars that they're collecting, from the municipal side, and the dollars that we're putting into the colleges and universities, are used for the purposes for which they're intended. Similarly, for hospitals and school boards, you want to ensure that they're not paying an additional tax burden of any sort, that they're rebated to keep them whole.

These aren't 100% rebates. The analyses were done as to what the balance was to find for all practical purposes. There needs to be a whole situation, and these are certainly broadly agreed-upon numbers that will allow that to occur.

Those of us who are paying for our hospital systems, or paying our school board taxes, in part as we pay them through our municipal taxes, will not be doubling up, in essence, on our payments because we will ensure that those broader public sector bodies are whole in this process.

Most of these PSBs, or public service bodies, would be able to use what they call a special quick method of accounting, which would further simplify their tax reporting requirements. And by reducing the amount of paperwork they're going to have to do, that the bodies are required to do, they can put more time and energy into the work they have to do.

I'm not going to go into the special quick method of accounting, but it's a strategy that would be put in place to ensure that they can turn around their numbers in quick order, with relative ease, in that sense.

That's part of the administrative part of this and one of the reasons why, at least in part, it takes as long as it does to be able to implement something of this nature. There are lots of administrative aspects to it that one will have to consider and work through with our federal partners in particular on this, let alone our municipal partners and businesses as they get themselves ramped up for the implementation of an HST, subject to this debate and one at the federal level, in July of next year.

One of the early-on issues, when we did the spring budget at the end of March—so we haven't had any lack of time from the end of March, spring, summer, fall of this year, to have discussion about this matter with constituents, stakeholder groups, business and community organizations of one sort or another. I think there has been a broad opportunity for us, as members and as constituencies, and through the media and elsewhere, to continue the dialogue around this particular matter.

I mentioned the importance of the homebuilding industry to the provincial economy, and there's no question, as we look at the various reports that we each would have seen over the years, about how important the building industry is.

We only need to look around, in a good economy, to see the homes being built, the renovations being done, the intensity of urbanization that occurs in the centre of Toronto, as an example. We only need to look to the almost daily, if not weekly, reports about the housing building, the housing sales, as indicators of the economic climate we find ourselves in.

I think it's all pretty readily agreed universally now that one of the big issues that drove us into this economic wasteland that we found ourselves in was the situation in the US, where their housing market collapsed around them. So if we use that scale and look at our own, we can see how important the industry is generally.

After the HST and the budget were introduced, one of the things we knew was that there would have to be effective consultation along the way with various stakeholders throughout that process.

One of the issues we needed to have a look at was housing. In doing that we announced, I think it was on June 18, that new homes purchased for primary residence, across all price ranges, would qualify for a rebate of up to $24,000.

The effective impact of that is that if you buy a new home for under $400,000, there is no PST implication. It doesn't completely mirror, as I understand it, the federal situation with the GST, because I believe they cap out at $350,000, not $400,000. Ours is a $400,000 cap. So for the most part, new home purchasers, modest move-up purchasers, broadly across the province—there may be pockets where that won't occur—would not see the impact of the HST on a new home purchase.

We think that was a responsible, negotiated position both from the standpoint of the importance of the housing industry in this province and certainly of consumers in the purchasing of homes, whether it's their first home or it's a move-up home within that kind of range.

We recognized, obviously, very early on in the process that we would not include the provision for an HST on resale homes. They remain exempt, as they have been, for that type of taxation, both GST-wise and otherwise. But for new homes there was a specific provision made that I think has been well received broadly throughout the province of Ontario.

I'm going to move on to some other things. I'm going to talk a little bit about the implications that are there for vehicle transfers, but there may be other opportunities to do that as we go forward.

1620

I want to talk a little bit about the budget proposal in this legislation for an additional $40 million to enhance the apprenticeship training tax credit, which supports businesses that hire and train apprentices. We've had a lot of discussion about the work of apprentices. We've had a lot of discussion about the work of our colleges, in particular, in developing apprentices, and how important it is to business, and obviously to the trainee, to have apprenticeship tax credits in place to encourage business to take on apprentices and give them the training they need to replace workers who in many cases will probably move out of the workforce in not too many years, and how we can go about that and enhance that situation so that we are producing a well-trained and highly educated workforce for what is going to be an increasingly innovative economy.

For those who have been standing up and saying they don't expect the economy to look different in five years than it looks today, I think we're all in some agreement that it will be different. We're not sure how it's going to look—probably none of us in this room know quite how it's going to look—but we know it's not going to be the same as it is today. So we have to prepare ourselves for that, and one of the ways to do that is through things like an apprenticeship tax credit.

The proposed enhancements would see a 35% refundable tax credit made available to employers on the salaries and wages paid to eligible apprentices in qualifying trades. That's a significant amount of tax credit—35%. It's a significant amount to the employer to take on primarily young people in apprenticeship functions. For small employers, though, the credit would be 45%, recognizing there is a cap on that. The annual cap to this point has been some $5,000. That's going to be doubled to $10,000. Ten thousand dollars will go a long way to support a young person or someone moving into a new career—a second career—as an apprentice in the work environment they're training in.

There are a number of initiatives being taken as part of this bill and that came as part of the budget which are now coming into the legislative framework of this. Ontario's entertainment and creative cluster is considered to be a cornerstone of Ontario's new, innovative economy. We've certainly paid some considerable attention,

over the past four or five years, to the importance of that industry here in Ontario. It boosts economic growth, and attracts business, skilled workers and, in particular, investors to Ontario.

We're undertaking to look at book-publishing tax credits. Further, we are looking at computer animation and special-effects tax credits—we're covering a range—the film and television tax credit, the film production services tax credit and the interactive digital media tax credit. I'm not going to speak to the details of those. What I wanted to reference was the headings, the highlights. It's a range of innovative, cultural industries in this province, for which, as they invest here, as they hire workers here, as they use products and services here, there's a tax credit available. It's not as though we're making a grant to them in any way. We're having them invest and providing some credit back to build and enhance the opportunity we have for an innovative economy in the province of Ontario—maybe part of what is now being referred to as more a creative economy, and this is a big part of what one might consider to be a creative economy.

In addition to those entertainment and creative clusters that we're focused on providing assistance and support to and encouraging growth in, we know that tourism has a much broader appeal across the province. We know that certain industries obviously do get clustered or that they're fairly specific to their functionality. Tourism touches virtually every community, if not every community, in this province. It certainly touches every riding in this province. There's probably not a member in this place who hasn't risen at some point or other to speak about the importance of tourism and specific aspects of it within their riding.

As part of our tax package, we're going to commit to providing some $40 million for destination marketing for Ontario tourism regions. These have yet to be formally established. Part of our tourism strategy study identified the need to do that. Work is ongoing to identify those and nail them down. But the idea of providing some $40 million for destination marketing will provide those tourism regions with the tools and the resources they need to be able to market their region as a destination place for the functions that best service them.

We only need to look around this province at any given time of the year, and in our own minds, broadly, we can probably identify tourist areas and tourist functionalities that we can grow and do better at than we're doing as a province. We all know Niagara Falls; it's obviously known throughout the world. It's probably number one. If you ask someone from anywhere else in Canada what they know about, if it's not Niagara Falls, it's probably the Rocky Mountains—it seems like a starting point, anyway. But how many of those outside of the province, outside of the country and outside of North America might know about some of the opportunities that exist here in the winter, might know about the snowmobiling we have and the types of packages in communities that gear themselves to that kind of activity? How many would readily recognize—probably quite a number—the Shaw and the Stratford Festivals? Obviously, a broad group do, but there would be lots who probably wouldn't. We need more resources to be able to market those as destinations, to get people into this province to take advantage of the wonderful tourism opportunities that exist here.

I know there are places in this province that one of these days I'd love to be able to visit. Every now and again, someone will say to me, "Have you ever been to" such and such. "Have you been to this tourist event? Have you been to this part of the province?" I find that I haven't been nearly as much as I would like.

I recently went with my wife to Ontario's west coast. It's only in the past couple of years that I've really seen that as a marketing tool. I don't often get down that way, along Lake Huron; I tend to travel east from where I am, north and east. It's one of those things where you get in your car, you're going somewhere out of town, and you tend to turn in one direction because you're familiar with the highway. Maybe it's the interchange: It's easier to make a left than a right turn onto the 401. I'm not sure. Maybe it's the lights that are there. But I had a wonderful opportunity to be on Ontario's west coast visiting Goderich and had a wonderful evening at a bed and breakfast. It was a wonderful night at a bed and breakfast owned by a former Ajax resident, if I might say so, who's an absolutely fabulous cook, a gourmet cook. We had a wonderful time.

The point I'm making is that "Ontario's west coast" was something that wasn't in my mind two years ago, and now I think about it. Every now and then it pops up: Ontario's west coast. It's a tool. I'm hopeful and optimistic that the $40 million we're talking about as part of this overall tax reform package for destination marketing for tourism will enhance and support exactly those types of strategies that will build the economies here in the province of Ontario.

There are a number of Financial Administration Act changes that are going to occur as part of this. I think one of the members opposite spoke to how this particular bill has a number of aspects to it, and it does. There are matters related to the financial acts. There is certainly work that we will have to do with the federal government as we move to the HST. As an example, there will be a number of employees who we will have to manage, as we did with the corporate tax consolidation—I forget the acronym we used for that. A couple of years back, there was concern about employees who might be dislocated. As it turned out, those employees were either accommodated within the federal system or within the provincial system in other ways.

There is obviously considerable work going on right now to ensure there will be no dislocation from the employment base of those in the Ontario public service who provide this service in the context of collecting and managing the PST function. There are quite a number of those very skilled people. We want to ensure that we continue to use those skills available to us, or that the

federal government will have the opportunity to acquire that skill set for the functionality they will be taking on. Obviously, there will still be work to do, ideally in a more efficient and effective fashion than we are currently able to provide.

This is a comprehensive tax reform package. I spoke briefly early on about the business implications, about the transitional funding that will occur. I have spent little, if any, time talking about the reduction in the personal income tax which about 93% of Ontarians will be able to take advantage of. I haven't spoken to the some 90,000 lower-income Ontarians who will no longer find themselves in a position of having to pay provincial income tax. I haven't spoken specifically to the quantum of savings that are going to be seen by small business—I believe the number is about $4.5 billion over three years—that will find its way back into the economy. I haven't spoken of the larger quantum of some $10.6 billion that will be going out to the people of Ontario directly: not to businesses, but paid out to the people of Ontario through transitional funding, income tax reductions, permanent rebate structures and mirroring the GST rebate for lower-income individuals.

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I know that young individuals just starting out in the workforce in many cases find themselves, because of their tax brackets, eligible for a GST rebate during the year. When those cheques came in—I believe they are on a quarterly basis—when my kids were starting out in the workforce, they appreciated having that cheque. It gave them a little something extra just at that point in the year that they might need it. This harmonization will create a very similar environment because of eligibility for rebates: an equivalency to a PST payment. I know that as those come in, they will be well-used, whether it's by young people starting out or those in the workforce with families who find themselves in a position where this additional support is helping.

When those additional fiscal supports go not only to the family as a family but to each individual in a family, it provides a way for us to ensure that we're best meeting the needs of smaller families and larger families. If you have four or five kids—and there are still lots of families who have those—it's nice to know that if you're eligible for those rebates, they're going to be paid for each of the children in the family as well as the parents, not just a lump sum payment. So we're trying to be, obviously, sensitive to the need and where the need is greatest.

The targeted tax measures that we're setting in place are intended to support key sectors in the economy. It's deliberate. They're intended to spur innovation in the economy and to increase the skills of those who are looking to fill those new positions. There was a strong consensus among experts, including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the C.D. Howe Institute, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association and others that these measures will increase investment, productivity and real per capita incomes in the long run.

I have tried to provide as much evidence as I can from all the research that has been done that we'll see short-term change, a flow-through of the opportunity for those savings, and see longer-term changes in the saving of jobs. I hope that when the vote is called, all members of this House will feel so inclined to support this important—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This bill on the HST going through without public hearings is a travesty of the democratic process. This is indeed the largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history, and to have this bill go through the House and through the process without public hearings is something that's unfathomable in my political experience. In our day, when we were in government, we had some very unpopular pieces of legislation, but we took them on tour. We took Bill 40 on tour. There were disruptions at almost every location we went to, but we did it because it was the—

Mr. Michael Prue: Because it was a bad bill.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member in the third party says, "Because it was a bad bill." They didn't agree with it—

Mr. Michael Prue: Still don't agree.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —and still don't; however, we disagree on that, from different ends of the spectrum. But that bill went to all corners of this province. They were very difficult times. In fact, we split the bill in two and did twice as many hearings as others might do.

This situation is repeating itself because in 2007, during the last provincial election, Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes, and here he is, bringing in the largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history. Remember, in 2003, standing beside the elm tree on television saying, "I'm not going to increase your taxes"? Then, of course, he brought in the largest overall tax increase in Ontario's history. So this is repeating itself. It's a sad day when the people of Ontario can't believe what their Premier tells them and then their opinions are totally ignored.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's always a pleasure to comment on a speech by the member from Pickering–Scarborough East. He prefaced his remarks by saying he was standing up in support of the bill and he wanted to be counted. At first I thought, "Wow, is this ever novel that a government backbencher is standing up in support of a bill that he knows is going to do him much political damage." Then I had to stop and think that he is, after all, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, and if he had stood up and said anything other than what he said, I am sure that heads would have rolled, and his would have been the first. So I took it with a grain of salt.

But then he went on to talk about his constituents, and the only constituents he talked about, an older couple who had supported him for years, aren't too happy with the bill. I would suggest that if he had had more time, he would have told us that literally all of his constituents who have approached him are not supportive of the bill.

He did speak at some length, and he tried to defend the bill as best as he possibly could within the time allotted to him, about many of the measures. As time permits me, I just want to talk about how I believe some of his hopes for the pass-throughs are a little naive.

He is stating that the pass-throughs happened in the Maritimes. Thereby, as the costs went down for business, they lowered their prices for ordinary consumers. But I would remind him that in the Maritimes what happened wasn't just a combination of the GST with the PST; the Maritimes all dropped their portion by two or three per cent. So the pass-throughs were much easier and the governments were able to have a much easier time putting that through. It was more revenue-neutral, quite frankly, than what is being proposed today.

The second thing: He's not talking about the pass-throughs for the First Nations. If anybody is getting a raw deal on this, it's the First Nations, because they're literally paying all of the money; none of it's coming back to them in any form whatsoever when the purchase is off reserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to compliment you, first of all, before I make very short comments on the member from Pickering–Scarborough East. Not only is he the present member, but he's the former mayor of Pickering and he comes here with a lot of experience. He knows very closely the difficulties and problems associated with governing, especially for the needy, the working class and seniors, so I have to comment on the presentation from the member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

When we go through a particular economic situation it affects everyone, perhaps some more than others. But when we debate certain laws and proposals in this House, we have to make sure we present the whole story, not half of the story. For me, for the people I represent, I think it's important that we let them know the other half of the story, how they are being affected by the HST.

They are interested to know that 92% of them will be receiving a tax cut. I think that's very important for them: 90,000 no longer will be paying provincial taxes. Doubling the current sales tax credit I think is important for them, and it's so important because a lot of them live on fixed incomes.

It is important that we let our seniors know what they are getting. As of January 1 next year, not only will their personal tax go down but they will be receiving an increase in the amount they normally get in tax credits every year. It will go from $250 to $500. Next January, with the refundable sales tax credit, they will be getting as much as $260. So I think it's important that they know the other half of the story.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on Bill 218 as well. I did consultation in my riding over the last couple of weeks and had the opportunity again just this weekend. I can tell you from the comments in my riding, the people I spoke to, the average man and woman, the hockey parent, the soccer mom and dad, the real people—they don't write any white papers or brown papers, from Jack Mintz or from people like that—are saying they're against this tax. We're going to keep on this tax about having all-party consultations across this province. That's what people want, and that's what they're telling me.

1640

I was at a breakfast buffet on Sunday and a lady sent me a handwritten note on a napkin. I'm going to bring it to the House tomorrow, and I'm going to show it to some of the people on the other side.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I don't care. They can do what they want.

Anyway, that's what people say. They don't have to hire a high-priced consultant to tell them why they should be in favour of this tax. The ordinary people see through this. There's the old saying, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." They see through this. The Liberal members know that, on the other side. They've got their heads down. They know that.

We need these all-party hearings and we need to take them across the province. We need to have public consultation on this. It's one of the biggest tax grabs—it's a revenue rip-off, as someone said—in Ontario history. They're using time allocation to try to cripple debate, and they're ignoring legitimate points of order. It's an abuse of process.

The PC caucus is disappointed but not surprised by the tactics of this government. That's why we will continue to call for public consultations and we'll use every legitimate tool at our disposal to disrupt passage of this terrible tax.

It's clear that the McGuinty government is prepared to abuse its parliamentary majority to have its way.

This is not over. It's not over by a long shot. This caucus and the members on this side of the House won't consider this law until the day people have to start paying it: Happy Canada Day, July 1, 2010.

Ladies and gentlemen watching this debate, get ahold of your Liberal members, get ahold of all the members. Write us—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: First, I'll just acknowledge and thank the members from Halton and Beaches–East York, York West and Sarnia–Lambton for their comments after that time frame.

I hear the members from Halton and Sarnia–Lambton, and their refrain remains the same. Let me just suggest to you, yet again, that we've had this dialogue going now since, at the very least, March of this year. It's not fresh, it's not new. It's not as though we introduced legislation last week that introduced this subject to the people of

Ontario. There has been a tremendous amount of opportunity for us all to seek and hear inputs.

To the member from Beaches–East York: I certainly heard your comments with respect to the experience on the east coast and the First Nations, as well. We've made a notation accordingly, particularly as it relates to the First Nations, as it impacts us here in Ontario. We'll certainly raise that matter with the minister as well—from Hansard and elsewhere.

To the member from York West: Thank you for your comments about ensuring, as best we can, that we try to get the entire story out—not just one part of the story—about the implications of the HST, the objectives that are there, and about creating a strong economy in the future here in the province of Ontario.

I'm just going to take the last 30 or 40 seconds, if I can, to talk very briefly about where this process is. It was a memorandum of understanding that was signed in the spring. It resulted in what's called CITCA, the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement. It was negotiated and signed on November 9 of this year and has gotten us to where we are at today. What are the important elements of this? CITCA requires the federal government to make its best efforts to introduce required legislation by March 31 of next year. So there's a certain imperative on us to have this debate and move along, as our initiative, so that they can undertake the debate—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to debate and to respond to the parliamentary assistant, to begin with. As he correctly pointed out, the government has till March 31 to pass legislation. So that's plenty of time to hold public hearings on Bill 218. I'm sure that there are a lot of people all around the province who would like to have their views known on this bill. That's plenty of time to hold the public hearings on such a substantial bill.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to lead off debate on Bill 218. On behalf of the PC caucus, I will also speak to the reasoned amendment which I filed notice of last week.

Let's start off with, what is Bill 218? It is a substantial bill. The McGuinty government calls this bill the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009. Like many things that this government puts forward, the name is more about optics than anything else. The proper title of the bill is: An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. When they say "various" they are not kidding: There are 22 affected acts, to be precise. They're referred to in the bill in various schedules.

Schedule A amends the Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996. It's bringing in some new taxes, particularly on beer and some of the small wineries and beer producers. It's a new tax that's supposed to be replacing fees that were in place, but I'm sure the people in that business would like the opportunity to have their say about how it does affect their particular business. I know we have some small breweries in Parry Sound–Muskoka. Lakes of Muskoka Cottage Brewery produces some excellent beers, one that was picked and is being served in the Legislature this year. There's a new brewery that just started up in South River. There's Cranberry Winery in Bala. Those businesses, I'm sure, would like to look at this proposal and make sure it doesn't adversely affect their business.

Schedule B deals with the Architects Act. It clarifies rules under which firms can incorporate.

Schedule C deals with the Commodity Futures Act. I understand that's a minor technical amendment.

Schedule D deals with the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act.

Schedule E deals with the Condominium Act, 1998. It allows securities with banks and credit unions.

Schedule F deals with the Co-Operative Corporations Act.

Schedule G deals with the Corporations Tax Act—tax credits for Ontario film and television.

Schedule H deals with the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act, 1994, to permit deposits in trust.

Schedule I amends the Education Act with various provisions around budgets, reserve funds and grants. That's part of the bill that I certainly think needs further looking into and time to reflect on.

Schedule J deals with the Financial Administration Act.

Schedule K deals with the interim appropriation for 2010-11. It's the supply part of this bill.

Schedule L deals with the Management Board of Cabinet Act. It amends the number of board members.

Schedule M amends the Ministry of Revenue Act and provides for pension issues relating to reassigned retail sales tax staff.

Schedule N deals with the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008.

Schedule O deals with the Ontario Loan Act, 2009, and provides authority for borrowing on the deficit, adding another, I think, $15.1 billion onto the debt that was not previously announced back in the March budget.

Schedule P amends the Proceedings Against the Crown Act.

Schedule Q amends the Professional Engineers Act and clarifies the rules under which firms incorporate.

Schedule R amends the Retail Sales Tax Act. It ratifies the CITCA and provides for implementation of the HST. It's certainly one of the key parts of this bill.

Schedule S amends the Securities Act.

Schedule T is the Succession Duty Legislation Repeal Act, 2009.

Schedule U amends the Taxation Act, 2007.

Schedule V amends the Teachers' Pension Act—changes to contributions to the fund.

Schedule W amends the Toronto Futures Exchange Act.

I've just gone through the various acts that are amended. Obviously, there are many people across the province affected particularly by the part that implements

the HST, and I'm sure those people would like to have their voices heard, as is the case with most bills when they pass through the Legislature. In this case, it looks like the government wants to get it through quickly and doesn't want to listen to the people in the province of Ontario.

Of course, the most important thing this bill does is provide for the implementation of the HST and ratify the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement, the CITCA, between Ontario and Canada, which was signed on November 9, 2009. I'll come back to parts of the bill that deal with the harmonized sales tax, or, as the PC caucus calls it, the DST, or Dalton sales tax.

1650

I have put forward a reasoned amendment to the bill. Bill 218 is also a supply bill, a money bill that allows the government to pay its bills. That is done through schedule K of Bill 218. Supply bills are not out of the ordinary, and for that reason I would like to move this reasoned amendment:

I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts, be amended by deleting all the words after "That" and substituting therefor the words "That this bill be not now read a second time but be referred back to the government with instructions to incorporate therein:

"(1) that schedule K in Bill 218 be deleted; and

"(2) that the said schedule K be introduced as a separate public bill."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Miller has moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts, be amended by deleting all the words after "That" and substituting therefor the words "That this bill be not now read a second time but be referred back to the government with instructions to incorporate therein:

"(1) that schedule K in Bill 218 be deleted; and

"(2) that the said schedule K be introduced as a separate public bill."

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that there is business that the government must be able to conduct and essential programming that needs to be delivered, and a supply bill provides the necessary authority to achieve that. That's why the amendment would remove schedule K and make it a separate bill. That at least is transparent and straightforward, unlike the rest of Bill 218.

The problem with this bill is that it does something critical—historic, even. That is, it provides for the harmonized sales tax, ratifying the CITCA that the McGuinty government signed in secrecy, without any fanfare, on November 9, 2009, binding us—that being the province of Ontario—to the harmonized sales tax. As my colleague from Nepean–Carleton pointed out to the House on Monday, Bill 218 is more than just a $3-billion tax grab. As part of the HST, the McGuinty government has relinquished a significant portion of our sales tax powers to the federal government. That means this Legislature will no longer have direct control over what is and what is not subject to direct taxation power, nor will we be able to change taxation in our province. The bill is without question the most significant taxation legislation in the history of this province. Worse, it does this at the expense of its citizens.

I had the occasion to have lunch with former Premier and finance minister Ernie Eves recently. I asked him for his perspective on the harmonized sales tax. He said that when he was Minister of Finance, the Chrétien government of the day did come and speak with him. Paul Martin tried to sell him on the idea of the harmonized sales tax. They made proposals. The PC government of the day evaluated those proposals and then they decided against it.

He posed the question, "Do you think, if this wasn't going to generate more revenue for the McGuinty government, they would actually be going ahead with it?" The answer, of course, is no. "Do you think that these cost savings that businesses will get with the value-added part of the tax are going to be passed on to the consumer?" The answer is no. We have a government that's facing a $24.7-billion deficit, so they're looking at ways that they can raise additional revenues.

There is significant public reaction to the HST, as any member in this House—I'm sure the Liberal members as well—would see, which is why there should be public hearings on this bill, as most bills have when they pass through this Legislature. One thing is for sure: The public is angry, at least the ones who are contacting me about this tax.

Unfortunately, though, the great majority of people who don't necessarily follow the day-to-day goings-on around this Legislature or aren't too politically involved will come to realize, on July 1, 2010, that they're paying 8% more on gasoline, hydro, meals and so many other things, when they pull up to the gas station and all of a sudden the price of gas has gone up 8% a litre, or they fill up their home heating oil tank and find out that the price has gone up 8% a litre, or they pay their hydro bill and find out it has gone up by 8%.

But there are groups that do follow the things going on around this Legislature, and they're trying to make their voices heard. We're trying to help them by getting the government to hold public hearings across the province. Groups like CARP, which represents thousands of retired Ontarians, are upset and fearful of the burden this tax will put on them. CARP Action Online asked readers to weigh in on the decision by the provincial governments of both BC and Ontario to implement a harmonized sales tax in 2010. A strong majority—75%—oppose the HST. Respondents don't believe that the tax credits will be sufficient to offset the tax increase created by the HST, and 85.4% of them don't believe that businesses will pass through their savings to consumers, and that's exactly what Mr. Eves was suggesting as well.

The Ontario Home Builders' Association is quick to point out the negative impact of the HST. The residential

renovation sector accounts for $20.3 billion of investment activity in Ontario, accounting for 4% of the provincial economy and 195,000 jobs. The HST will negatively impact the contractor-renovation sector, which accounts for 70% of all renovation investment. It will increase the tax burden on homeowners and rental housing investors by $757 million annually and triple the sales tax rate on contractors' renovations in Ontario.

The harmonized sales tax will reduce the volume of renovation activity by contractors because of higher costs for homeowners, which will result in lower economic activity and employment. The harmonized tax will also shift more renovation and repair jobs from contractor assignments to do-it-yourself projects, potentially resulting in long-term negative consequences for the quality of the housing stock.

Interjection: Underground economy.

Mr. Norm Miller: Good point. My colleague behind me is talking about the underground economy. He must have seen my speech, because that's the next line.

Most importantly, the harmonized sales tax is likely to shift more activity into the underground economy as consumers try to get the same value for their hard-earned dollars. The Ontario Home Builders' Association has calculated that the losses could be significant: up to $298 million in lost GST revenue annually; up to $1.6 billion in income tax revenue lost each year; and up to $167 million lost from other revenues such as CPP, WSIB, the employer health tax and employment insurance premiums.

OHBA president James Bazely says that Ontario renovators expect an explosion in the amount of renovation work being done underground as consumers look for ways to save the 8% HST. I'd like to quote him: "Unfortunately, the underground economy is already thriving due to the GST, and the new HST is like throwing gasoline on a fire....

"Unless governments approve a plan to discourage cash transactions, honest and legitimate renovators won't be able to compete with black market renovators—and that spells disaster for our industry with major job losses and ultimately dwindling revenue for governments...."

As an aside, this government has already further encouraged the underground economy in the building sector as Bill 119, which requires mandatory WSIB for all contractors, comes into place a couple of years from now. That's going to be an additional $11,000 cost for each of these small contractors, as was pointed out by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. When it comes into effect, that will further add to this underground economy.

1700

Mutual funds: That's something that affects just about everyone who doesn't have a pension plan, including MPPs sitting in the Legislature here and so many Canadians who are saving for retirement. For Canadians trying to plan for retirement, a new harmonized sales tax will cut into savings. Investors now pay 5% GST on management fees and most operating expenses of mutual funds and segregated funds. A harmonized tax means these fees will be further taxed by 8%.

The impact will be significant for Ontario, where the bulk of Canada's $650-billion mutual fund industry is based—it's actually $608 billion. The mutual fund industry has warned that the HST will drive up the cost of an investment product used by many middle-class Canadians. In fact, I met with the industry a while back, and they were estimating that the additional cost annually to investors will be $300 million to $500 million in the province. That is quite significant. Funds are being taxed effectively at four to five times the rate of other savings vehicles, such as guaranteed investment certificates, term deposits and stocks.

The Investment Funds Institute of Canada, IFIC, says that the higher tax rate on management expense ratios, MERs, means that an Ontarian putting $5,000 a year for 35 years into mutual funds will lose about $42,000, or about eight years of savings, due to the compounding of small HST amounts each year. Under the current regime with just the GST, the investor's return goes down by about $17,000 over the same period.

Barbara Amsden, IFIC director of research and strategy, explains: "What used to be the caviar of the financial services products is now kind of macaroni and cheese."

Let me read to you from someone who helps ordinary Ontarians manage their savings:

"I have been running a financial advisory business in your riding for over 20 years, serving more than 300 households in our community. My business not only contributes directly to the economy, but also helps local residents plan for and achieve their financial goals.

"I'm very concerned about the HST because it is essentially a new tax on savings. The combined 13% tax will directly impact the savings of all Canadians who own investment funds. It will cost Ontario residents hundreds of millions of dollars every year in extra taxes that otherwise could be put into their retirement savings.

"Consider a small investor who has $20,000 in mutual funds and who contributes $4,000 each year. Over a 20-year period, the HST would mean an additional $4,000 in tax. This investor would lose an entire year's worth of savings. Because the HST is being applied to the cost of managing the mutual fund, investors would have to pay it each and every year. What's ironic is that the more people save, the more tax they will pay!"

This letter continues: "I find it difficult to understand why this tax is being introduced when there is growing recognition that most Canadians will retire with inadequate incomes. With government looking to deal with this very serious issue, it makes no sense to be raising taxes for people who have taken the initiative to provide for their future. As a financial advisor, I know how hard it is for the average family to save, and they should not be penalized for it.

"I realize that the harmonized tax is meant to make Ontario businesses more competitive, especially our

manufacturers. However, it will have a significant impact on savers in our province."

But savings are not the only form of investment vehicle that will be negatively impacted by your harmonized sales tax. It affects real estate as well. OREA, The Ontario Real Estate Association, estimates that the new tax will add $1,499 in new taxes to an average resale home costing $302,354. Homebuyers and sellers will pay 8% more on legal fees, appraisals, real estate commissions, home inspection fees and moving costs. OREA also says that the HST will add an estimated $262 million in new taxes annually to residential resale real estate transactions. For homeowners, the HST will also add hundreds of dollars in additional tax on utility bills such as gas, electricity, home heating fuel, home renovation labour, the cost of lawn upkeep or landscaping and the cost of snow removal—all some pretty basic things.

Pauline Aunger, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association, says, "The government of Ontario can try to sell the HST any number of ways, but starting July 1, 2010, the taxes on buying, selling and owning a home in our province will go up. Ontario's housing market is vital to the health of our provincial economy. An HST on home ownership will reduce housing affordability and increase the tax burden for Ontario families." She added, "In the last decade, Ontario's homeowners have faced a barrage of government-imposed costs. From municipal land transfer taxes to skyrocketing property taxes and now the HST, homeowners are once again being forced to foot the bill for this government's legislative agenda."

Some quick facts about the HST: The harmonized sales tax adds 8% provincial sales tax, or PST, to a list of goods and services that were previously exempt, including utilities, home renovation labour, landscaping, snow removal and many others. OREA estimates that HST on these services will add $480 in annual tax to the homeowner, based on a family that budgets $500 per month for such costs. That's $480 per year for the average family. Ontario's real estate industry is essential to the provincial economy. In 2008, real estate in Ontario accounted for $56.6 billion in sales, $6.01 billion in ancillary economic spending and $1.35 billion in land transfer tax revenue to the provincial government. In addition, independent research indicates that the resale housing market creates 80,000 direct and indirect jobs.

They have provided a little chart to demonstrate the additional taxes on your average resale home in Ontario. That average home sells for $302,354. So after the HST comes into effect, you'll pay an extra $80 more tax on legal costs. Beyond what you used to pay, you'll pay an extra $1,209 on the real estate commission. You'll pay an extra $32 HST on home inspection, you'll pay an extra $80 tax on moving costs, you'll pay an extra $24 tax on the home appraisal and you'll pay an extra $24 tax on the home energy audit, totalling an additional tax of $1,449.

Clearly, the dream of home ownership under this government just keeps getting harder and further out of reach. The real trick may be hanging on to your home in what should be your golden years. Recently I've heard from the magazine association, because of course last week the government made a special exemption for those people who enjoy a morning newspaper and a coffee, but not all print media are equal in the eyes of the McGuinty government. Let me share with you a letter to Mr. McGuinty from Magazines Ontario dated November 13, 2009. It's quite current. This is the letter:

"Premier, we were absolutely shocked to read that newspapers are to be exempted from the HST and not magazines.

1710

"When we met with key Finance officials we were told that a similar approach for magazines would not be acceptable to the CRA. This is a step in the other direction. It makes our titles less competitive and more expensive. Add to this the fact that Ontario magazine publishers pay foreign magazine publishers' blue box costs while they generate the most waste. We are paying for the waste of our competitors. This is on top of the fact that the government of Ontario allows its LCBO to abuse its monopoly position to compete and undercut for very tight ad dollars with the private sector and produce a magazine the taxpayer is ultimately subsidizing.

"The $2-billion Ontario magazine industry is the largest of the cultural media in Ontario and competes in a global market right here in Canada. Most magazines in this province are published by smaller enterprises who, along with the larger multi-title companies, have been struggling with a massive downturn of over 30% in the advertising market. Ontario is home to 75% of the entire Canadian magazine industry and the thousands of permanent jobs and freelance opportunities for our creative workers in all parts of the province. And because Ontario magazines are an exclusively Canadian-content medium, the information, the advertising and the local and regional stories for and about Canadians drive interest in economic activity right here, not across the border. The HST decision further damages the competitive position of Ontario's magazines with its newspaper colleagues, but also the impact massive foreign media has on the industry. We have no doubt that this will be the tipping point, along with the other challenges, that finishes enterprises of value to our citizens and our businesses.

"In all our dealings with your officials on the HST matter, as well as on the other public policy impediments to competitiveness, we have made two points:

"(1) We only seek fair and equitable treatment." Sounds fairly reasonable to me.

"(2) We recognize the long-term need to increase Ontario's competitiveness.

"We know you can appreciate why we are dismayed with your government's response on the HST and other issues."

That letter is signed by Mark Jamison, CEO of Magazines Ontario/Canada.

Just so there is no confusion, Mark Jamison was quoted in the media this week after the newspaper exemption announcement and he said, "We're just gobsmacked.... I'm quite certain that we will lose magazines.

This will be the last straw. This came as a total shock because we made the same economic and cultural arguments ... as newspapers." As the Premier likes to do, he is once again picking winners and losers instead of letting the marketplace decide which businesses should succeed.

Reaction is coming in from every front, reaction the government clearly underestimated. I quite literally lost count of the number of petitions that have come through my office alone. They number in the thousands. Every day, citizen reaction comes in to me via letters and e-mails. I would like to give you a small sample of what Ontarians are saying about your harmonized sales tax. I received this e-mail on the weekend:

"Dear Mr. Miller,

"As an average Ontario taxpayer, I find it extremely worrisome that Premier McGuinty is pushing forward with the proposed HST tax. My family does not earn that much living and working in Muskoka and now I have the end of my own job looming for December 31, due to the retirement of the owner of the business. We are not only facing a decrease in income but also an increase in taxation for things that were not taxed before. Basic things like heat, hydro, utilities, as well as food, gas and the necessities are now going to cost the Ontario taxpayers 8% more than before. I currently work in a real estate office and know how hard this tax is also going to hit the homebuyer, 8% more cost on the purchase of their home, their real estate commission, legal fees etc. I feel this is, once again, a tax grab income for the government with little thought to how the average person on the street will manage their daily lives with less money to feed, house and clothe their families. The proposed $1,000 gift back to the taxpayer is a simple drop in the bucket and does not nearly cover what the ultimate costs will be to the working Ontario family as well as the retired persons who will be paying with their blood and sweat for years to come.

"My vote is no to the tax unless there are limits placed on where and how it is applied.

"As my representative, I would appreciate you expressing this dissatisfaction when it comes down to the vote. Thank you."

That was signed by a Huntsville resident who is clearly distraught at the thought of more taxes being brought in by this government. I can assure him that I will be following his instructions.

Here's another from a Gravenhurst resident. I should mention that he wrote to the Premier as well:

"Mr. Miller,

"I'll be very short. The implementation of the HST is wrong and there is absolutely no factual fiscal evidence that it will do what it's supposed to! As the MPP for Parry Sound–Muskoka I ask that you stop this tax grab by exercising any/all means available to you.

"Please don't respond with an automated reply—as the Premier's office has done. Thanks very much."

And I should say to that constituent of Parry Sound–Muskoka, it is obvious the opposition is doing everything and using all the tools, limited though they are, that we have to make the public aware of this tax and to delay the government passing it so quickly, so people can become aware of it. That's why we're asking for public hearings on Bill 218.

I'm absolutely certain that there are people in northern and rural communities who won't be able to keep the lights on or who simply won't be able to continue living in their homes. You'll force them out of house and home—quite a legacy.

Let me read to you an e-mail that was sent to me by a couple living in Larder Lake—that's in the riding of Timiskaming–Cochrane—and directed to their MPP. Here it goes:

"This is a note to let you know our feelings on the harmonization of the PST and GST.

"We feel that as seniors living in your riding we will have to shell out considerably more money than those in southern Ontario.

"For instance heating costs, hydro rates, Internet fees, telephone rates and transportation will rise considerably in northern Ontario.

"As you must be aware we are just beginning to enjoy retirement. The new HST increases on items never taxed before will cause hardship for those on fixed incomes.

"Knowing northern Ontario problems, I would have hoped the northern members in the Liberal Party would have had more influence with the Premier and would have lobbied for the northern residents to defeat this ill-planned tax grab; this does not seem to be the case!!!"—with three exclamation points.

"The rumoured refund we hear about will not compensate for the additional taxes over future years.

"We want you to know how dissatisfied we are with this proposal and your party for bringing it forward"—that would be the Liberal government.

That was from Larder Lake, which is near Kirkland Lake, for those who aren't aware.

1720

Another northern resident writes to the Premier:

"Sir, I can contend without fear of exaggeration that I already pay an exorbitant amount for propane and gasoline." Just to clarify, this was written in April. "I live in rural northern Ontario, so our furnace is still running and will continue to do so, well into May, and my wife and I have to commute 90 kilometres a day to go to work or buy groceries or to basically be a part of the land of the living. These two bills alone, sir, quite frankly kill us, and I simply cannot imagine having to pay 8% more just because two taxes became conjoined. I'm certain you will agree that with the current state of flux our economy is in, a seemingly unfair expectation for 8% more out of your taxpayers' pockets is grossly unfair. Also, when the economic ship again rights itself, I have no doubt that the cost of oil will start to rise back to the depressing echelons it reached last year. To imagine another 8% on $1.65 per litre for gasoline, sir, is almost too much to bear."

The concerns I'm hearing about are not limited to just individual residents or families. Every day, small businesses voice their concerns too.

I received this letter from a small business owner:

"Just wanted to inform you of my opinion re the ill-advised HST.

"When the federal GST became law, my livelihood (firewood production and distribution) was put in jeopardy. Many of my competitors, then as now, were not required to register for or charge the tax because their annual gross sales were under $30,000.

"Of late, folks are pretty tolerant and will readily pay 5% GST. It has been a struggle.

"Asking people to pay 13% in HST for firewood will not result in anything less than driving that part of the economy underground. Keep in mind that there are still, and always will be, suppliers who legally charge no tax whatsoever.

"My operation might be a drop in the bucket in the grand scheme of things. But to me, it's my livelihood.

"It's a detrimental law. Put a stop to it if you can."

That's a business in Muskoka. I think I know the business, but I won't name them.

A Parry Sound–Muskoka building supplier writes:

"Norm, I am writing to tell you we both totally do not agree with the new tax that is being implemented. As our 'voice,' please do your best to not allow this bill to continue. Contractors will find it very hard to collect. Many services will now cost more, and the little guy just can't afford it. I do not think this is a very good time to increase taxes. Our economic situation does not need to have this happen. We need to boost the economy, not hurt it."

Another business owner writes to me:

"I am a landscape designer. I am concerned about the effect of the new HST tax on our business.

"We are already feeling the effects of the recession and expect that the HST will further dampen the economy in Muskoka.

"We expect the underground economy will grow at the expense of legitimate businesses like ours." We've heard that many times.

"Would you please forward this to your colleagues in the government?"

Another astute business owner wrote:

"In his election platform, Mr. McGuinty said he would not increase taxes. So he is not increasing the rate of tax; he is taxing a good percentage of essential products and commodities which are currently exempt. For some people, this will be a source of anger and an inconvenience. To the vast majority, it will push them further and so far down the ladder of quality of life that they will feel hopeless.

"As a small business owner, it is an outright fabrication that this will reduce paperwork, time or effort to collect and process this tax.

"I am therefore requesting that you, as my elected representative in the Ontario provincial Parliament, do everything in your power to represent your constituents and put a stop to this legislation taking effect."

I can say that my colleagues and I are doing everything we can.

I'd now like to speak briefly about restrictions on input tax credits, because while I'm talking about business, I should mention that Ontario announced temporary restricted input tax credits for large businesses—that is, businesses with sales of $10 million or more—and financial institutions, including de minimus financial institutions, relating to energy, telecommunications services, certain road vehicles, and foods, beverages and entertainment under their harmonized sales tax plan.

Input tax credits are one of the supposed advantages to business of a harmonized sales tax, but some businesses will be denied. As I mentioned previously in the House, on page 134 of the budget—that's the budget from last year—you will find temporary ITC restrictions for business. It amounts to billions of dollars in input tax credits that would be denied to business. In year three it's $1.3 billion. One of the sales pitches to business is that they'll pay the tax but they'll get it back. However, as I just mentioned, for eight years, for many businesses, that advantage is going to be denied, and it's over $1 billion a year. Eight years is a long time for a business to survive. I think you will see many businesses not survive as a result of those denied input tax credits—over $1 billion a year for up to eight years, eight long years.

The opposition has been very forcefully and at every opportunity asking for consultation on HST aspects of the bill. I could read the quite literally hundreds of letters I've received on this government's plan to harmonize the sales tax. I think it's safe to say I haven't had as much correspondence, e-mails etc. on any other single bill that has been put forward in the eight years I've been here.

Generally speaking, the McGuinty government has done a terrible job of communicating to Ontarians and to Ontario businesses. There's a growing public pushback, and I think last week we saw a recognition of that by this government with the exemptions for meals under $4 and for newspapers. I just want to say that I've had more petitions and mail in the last few days since your photo op at Tim Hortons than I've had in the last few months. It has been the only honest effort you've made to inform Ontarians about the tax, and in fact it may have backfired.

We also heard the previous speaker talking about another aspect of this legislation that would bring tax credits for people who are becoming apprentices, and that's a positive move. However, as we pointed out on many other occasions, this government could quite easily create much more opportunity for apprentices to actually get placements to become electricians or plumbers or welders by just simply changing the apprenticeship ratios. Ontario is one of the few places that require, in the case of an electrician—and most people don't realize this—three journeymen, three active, working electricians, for one apprentice. On many, many occasions we have said this makes absolutely no sense whatsoever and they could create much more opportunity for apprentices by simply going to a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio, as most provinces in the country have.

Getting back to the HST, I also want to talk for a moment about tourism, because, of course, the current tax rate for tourist accommodation in the province of

Ontario is 5%. With the HST coming into effect, that's going to bump up to 8%, so you have an extra 3% tax right there that visitors to the area are going to have to pay. But then, as part of this bill, there's also another section that will allow up to 3% more tax in addition to the other 3%, so 6% more tax to be used for destination marketing.

There's another negative aspect of what's happening here, and that is that visitors to Ontario used to be able to go and buy goods and also get the retail sales tax back on accommodations if they applied for a rebate. I used to be in the tourism business. We would fill out the forms for visitors, and that would be another added reason to come and visit the province of Ontario. Through the passage of this bill, Ontario residents will no longer be able to get their rebates back. So not only will visitors to the province be facing up to 6% additional tax—3% that's called PST and another 3% in destination marketing tax—but they won't be able to get the tax back on accommodations or on goods they buy in the province. So this is increased taxes—more negative news for residents.

I was talking again about the HST and its effect on the average person. I was just recently in Kearney attending a seniors' event there, a corn roast, and I went out, as we politicians tend to do, to chat with some of the folks that were cooking the corn. As I walked out there, they said to me, "What are you going to do about our hydro rates?" That was about the way it was framed. I said, "Well, the one thing I can tell you is that, under this government, your hydro rates are going up, because not only do we have things like the green energy bill"—which we've shown is going to greatly increase hydro costs—"but one thing's for sure: You know you're going to be paying 8% more come next July." Unfortunately, that is the reality, and I don't see anything but hydro rates going up. And that's going to not only affect those seniors, but it's going to affect businesses.

As we have said many, many times, at every opportunity we have had on this side of the House—in question period, many of our questions have been geared toward why the Premier won't agree to public hearings on this bill. It's a very substantial bill. Obviously, based on the number of e-mails that I have just read into the record, there's tremendous interest in it. People want to be heard. I've never had so many different and thoughtful e-mails on a bill.

For that reason, we're trying to give the people an opportunity to go to a public meeting in London or Nipissing or North Bay—where else might they want to go?—or eastern Ontario or up north in Thunder Bay, to give people a chance to really know all the details of this bill and the stakeholders that are affected. So far, the government has absolutely not agreed to that. For that reason, to make our point, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Miller of Parry Sound–Muskoka has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1733 to 1803.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Miller of Parry Sound–Muskoka has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are five; the nays are 34.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, November 24.

The House adjourned at 1804.

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Government Publications

No. 191

Nº 191

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature



Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 24 November 2009

Mardi 24 novembre 2009

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Clerk
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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Sikh prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 19, 2009, on the motion for time allocation of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: So we have another time allocation motion before the House; this on Bill 210. We've seen in recent weeks that with every bill this government brings in, it brings in time allocation. And now we see the McGuinty Liberals pushing forward bills that aren't even in committee. They haven't even had any debate whatsoever. We've had first reading, we're in second reading, we haven't been to committee yet and now we have time allocation.

This Liberal government is going to be punished for its disregard and arrogance with the public. The public will not accept and stand for complete disregard for democratic processes and traditions. These actions by the Liberals are ill-conceived. They are arrogant and unacceptable in a truly democratic jurisdiction.

Bill 210 has deep-seated flaws. Time and time again, we have gotten up in this House, and so have the NDP, to point out that allowing warrantless entry into people's homes is a travesty; it is completely without regard for our constitutional protections. This bill, should it be passed in its present form, will undoubtedly be ruled unconstitutional at the first court case. But we've seen that these Liberals don't care about the Constitution. We saw that with their stunt driving law. Two courts have now ruled that it's unconstitutional, and they don't care. They don't care.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: So you don't care?

Mr. Randy Hillier: The member from Sudbury is interjecting. He thinks that disregarding the Constitution is acceptable, in his view. I'm sure the people of Sudbury don't agree with their member.

Regardless, they don't care about the Constitution; they don't care about protecting people's rights and freedoms. Bill 210 is just one more example.

Again, these things would come out through the committee process; they would come out through a debate. But the Liberals are not interested in debate. They're not interested in hearing what somebody else has to say. Their grand wizard has spoken and laid out the legislation. They don't care.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's right, the grand wizard from Ottawa—I believe that's his riding—has let everybody know that this is the way it will be.

This government is creating legislation that is not helping anybody. It's not helping the residents and the citizens and the taxpayers of this province. They're only concerned about creating legislation that sounds good, that gives them a sound bite and a little headline—a little picture, a photo op in the paper. That's what really motivates and drives this Liberal government and their agenda—a sound bite and a headline—as long as it doesn't get past 20 seconds or so, because after that they're completely inept at discussing and debating anything.

They're concerned about talking points, not about justice, not about the Constitution—talking points. They're also concerned to make sure they have good deals, sweetheart deals for their friends and fundraising buddies. We've seen that often enough in the last number of months through the summer of scandal and into the winter of discontent that will be upon the Liberals shortly: sweetheart deals for their fundraising buddies. And they're not concerned about the ramifications for the actual foreign live-in workers.

What is going to happen to these people if this legislation does pass? We should be having our arms open, encouraging and embracing those foreign live-in workers to come to this country, and this legislation will have the typical unintended consequences that come from not having discussion and debate on a bill. We will see—and we've talked to many people involved in that industry—that it just won't happen. A lot fewer foreign live-in workers will be able to get to our province and start that journey to landed immigrant and resident; that's without a doubt.

On this side of the House, we believe we should protect those who cannot protect themselves, and we know that that happens by having regard for our Constitution,

not having disregard for it. Foreign live-in caregivers are such a group.

I welcome the opportunity to bring this bill to committee to debate it, understand the full ramifications of it, and amend and modify it where necessary. We welcome the opportunity to create and assist with that legislation, which would then stand the test of time, unlike their other bills that, as soon as they come before the courts, are ruled unconstitutional.

But we all know how things go with this McGuinty Liberal majority. Everybody else's voices are unheard. Everybody else's concerns are unimportant. Everybody else is shouted down while they ram through their legislation, their agenda of talking points and sound bites—and time allocation. Stakeholders have been ignored, and consultations are really not consultations; they're predetermined facades.

0910

We all know what happens with a Liberal consultation: They come in with a decision, and then they bring in a few people to make it appear that there was some discussion. We saw it with Bill 173 and Bill 191. We've seen it with every bill this Liberal government brings in. Of course, we see it with the Premier's—the wizard's—grand proposal of the HST: no discussions, no public hearings, no debates, just ram it through. That's what they are doing with the HST. All the concerns that are raised—unimportant; it's unimportant what everybody else's concerns are. This pattern will hold true. If it does hold true, all the flaws are unimportant, all the problems.

I would like to just speak to that with the HST. Here we are; this Liberal government is delegating its jurisdiction to the federal government, delegating our responsibilities, our jurisdiction to the federal government, which is going to handcuff and bind future governments in Ontario as far as policy and jurisdiction.

I would like the members on the other side to just think what you're going to do when you handcuff future governments. Again, this is really a constitutional discussion with the HST, and I would say that the Liberal government has no regard for constitutional divisions of power—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: —no constitutional regard, and we've seen this on and on—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Order.

All right, the member may continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again, a disregard for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask the minister to come to order.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Some ministers have a lack of culture as well, and consideration; a lack of regard for our Constitution, delegating our authorities to other levels of government.

I would ask every Liberal member in this House, have you ever read any history? Go back and read about a Premier in this province, Oliver Mowat. Go back and read what he did. Go back and understand what the role of government is. Understand the importance of our Constitution and the importance of divisions of jurisdiction. It's not just a laughing and joking matter, as members from Sudbury and other ministers may think. This is an important—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker—withdraw?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll withdraw.

One thing is for sure: This government that was elected six years ago is not the same government we have today. It is rotting from the inside out. It is full of disregard and contempt for the constituents and residents of this province, without regard whatsoever for public hearings, significant and real discussion and debate. Once again, this bill has deep flaws, and the government refuses to acknowledge that those flaws exist. Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. That's what they're all about.

It will be interesting to see what happens, how the Liberal government acts in committee, as we've seen them so often in the past silent and mute, without any interest for actually listening to stakeholders and constituents. That's where we should be actually getting some amendments. But I have no belief, no confidence that this Liberal government cares whatsoever about anything anybody else has to say.

This government has not considered what will happen to this industry of legitimate foreign live-in caregivers, the agencies, and the hundreds and thousands of people who help them come to our country every year. Essentially, that industry will be made illegal by Bill 210. That whole industry will die and wither on the vine like so many other industries in this province under the Liberal government—wither and die away. They have no regard for our economic base, either. They have no regard for our Constitution. They have no regard for the consequences to our economy. Just move forward; move forward.

Earlier this month, my office met with a group of legitimate nanny agencies. They said to me, "We have been in business for over 20 years. We are not criminals. Why does this bill treat us as criminals?" It's because the Liberals—because of their callousness and their disregard for anybody but their talking points and sound bites.

This government will treat all but its own narrow group of Liberal friends with callousness—pure and simple; everybody else is unimportant. The origin of this bill was nannygate, with a Liberal member from the federal House, Ruby Dhalla. This government ignores the real problems out there but criminalizes a legitimate industry. It's terrible that this Liberal government really has no regard for its actions.

Because of this callousness, they will force tax after tax on this province. There will be bad legislation upon bad legislation. They completely ignore the wishes of the residents and taxpayers of this province—people who are being devastated by their actions and their legislation. Ultimately, their callousness will destroy, and has destroyed, their party's credibility. It is time for this government to wake up and realize that just like this bill,

they have flaws. It's time for them to realize that they do not have all the answers and that their perceptions are not the only perceptions. It's time for them to begin listening to people. It's time for them to fix their legislation before they bring it in and enact it. This is what this House is for.

The failure to have public hearings on the HST illustrates this total and absolute corruption of process and disregard for our Constitution and our laws. This Liberal government has no credibility whatsoever.

It is pointless to discuss these things with a government that is deaf to concerns. I move for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hillier has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0919 to 0949.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hillier has moved adjournment of the debate.

Those in favour will please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 42.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It must be wearing on the Liberal benches to have to always bark the orders and not be involved in real tangible discussion and debate. I thought I might demonstrate to the House how the Liberal backbenchers involve themselves in debate. For the next few minutes, I'm going to show the people of Ontario and the members of the Liberal Party how Liberals engage in debate.

First, they put their hands to their ears, because they don't want any outside stimulus interfering with the party line. This is an important first step for all Liberals: Keep their hands to their ears and don't allow anyone or anything to penetrate the talking points that they've been handed. This is very, very important. No Liberal can be nominated unless they can do this for at least a full parliamentary session. That's the first stage for a Liberal to engage in debate.

But the next step, of course, is to engage in the discussion. For a Liberal to engage in a fulsome discussion about important subjects of the day, their next step is to put their hand over their mouth. The silence of the lambs is often referred to.

After listening to their talking points and their lack of discussion about things like the HST, it's also important that we should demonstrate how Liberals enunciate their knowledge of the Constitution. It's much like the previous one. They like to demonstrate their knowledge and expand on their knowledge about their constitutional obligations like this. Another little silence of the youse I guess. Youse all be quiet over there; you are part of the Liberal Party.

But what's also important, of course, is the Liberal perception of reality. The Liberal perception of reality, of course, is handed down to them by their supreme leader, and it goes like this: They have to close their eyes to all others. The grand wizard has—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. I just ask the member to find alternative, to withdraw that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

Interjection: The grand pooh-bah.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Maybe "grand pooh-bah" would be better.

But that's the essence of a Liberal member in this House. That is the essence. That is the complete Liberal—deaf, dumb and blind to everything and anything other than what their leader has told them. There's an old adage about ignorance is bliss, and I know everybody is blissful on the other side of this House.

But really, when you get back to your ridings on—December 22, I guess, is when you're going to be getting back there. The Liberals have really thought that this discussion and debate is so worthy that we'll extend the sitting to December 22. Listen, I look forward to this. I look forward to being down here and having this Liberal Party in front of the media and the public every day so that they can demonstrate just how willing they are to engage in discussion and debate.

Interjection: They're going to serve us a turkey dinner.

Interjection: They're the Christmas turkeys.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Christmas turkeys will be out. They might be a little bit late, but they will be out this year.

This extended period of time affords you guys all the opportunity to engage in more of this debate, as I just demonstrated, and show your residents—your constituents—just what you're doing down here and how important what you're doing is, that it needs you to grab into their pockets, deeper and deeper, and take another $3 billion out of their pockets. That's what it is: $3 billion in extra tax and extra revenue for this government, who, as they're doing this and this and this, have spending out of control. This Liberal government is growing the bureaucracy, growing their agencies, growing government at twice the rate of inflation—greater than twice the rate of inflation. They have a significant spending problem.

I want you to get back into your ridings on December 22 and tell your residents how you just love spending their money. You love spending it so much that you're going to put another tax on them so you can continue to do it. For two more years—not quite two more years—you're going to be on a spending spree and you're going to be taking and taking and taking more money from hard-working, productive people in this province so you can keep your habits intact. But there will be a day—the day of reckoning is coming. On October 11, people will

pass judgment on you because you have not had the courage to get out and actually talk to people and hear their concerns. The pooh-bah has spoken. He has told you that public hearings are not an important part of democracy. Democracy is unimportant to those fellas on the Liberal side, as long as their leader has told them what to say and do and what to listen to.

Anyway, this whole Liberal government is really showing to the people of this province what a facade they are. There's some window dressing but there's no substance behind the facade. The facade is made up of those talking points; the facade is made up of those headlines and bullets, the slogans. I remember once talking to an individual, and he said, "Be careful of those who think in bullets and talk in slogans." I didn't realize it at the time, but he was talking about the Liberal Party: "Be careful of those guys. There's no substance to them. There's nothing inside, just a facade that's hollow."

Interjection: Empty.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Democracy is empty within them.

I really do call on this Liberal government and the backbenchers to stand up, take ownership and show regard for those people who elected you, those people who went out and cast ballots for you. Show them that there was a reason for it, that you're going to deliver value to them, that you're actually going to listen to them and that their concerns are of significance and importance to you. Go out and do that. Show all those residents, show all those constituents—show them, demonstrate to them that you are indeed an elected representative and not part of the "Youse be quiet" crowd of the McGuinty Liberals. Will you do that?

Go out during the break, the Christmas recess, even though it's going to be a little bit shorter. It's only going to be from December 22 now until the middle of February. Go out there and listen and engage in real discussion, engage in real debate. Show those constituents that you are something different. Show them that there's cause to have some belief and confidence in democracy in this province, and that you're just not a bunch of puppets on a string, bringing in time allocation motions when there is a real subject of interest.

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Show them that you have, and demonstrate that you have, knowledge of our Constitution. That would be a novel thing for this Liberal government to do: actually demonstrate that they understand what a constitution is and that they understand that we, in this province, have a role that was crafted through debate—real debate—back in 1867; a division of powers, a division of authority, and checks and balances to ensure that this great country, this Confederation, would run and operate in a sound, peaceful and secure fashion with regard for the freedoms and rights of the people of this country. Go out there and show them. Read a couple of books during that break between the times when you're pondering how you're going to get out of a public meeting to discuss the HST. Read up a little bit.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a Liberal Premier in this province, back in its early days: Oliver Mowat. He was a Liberal Premier. He fought with the federal government over constitutional jurisdiction on four different occasions. His name was Oliver Mowat. He took those cases to the Privy Council in London, which was our highest court at that time, and he won each and every time because he understood his job and understood the Constitution. He was opposed to Sir John A. Macdonald, another one who understood the Constitution. But Oliver Mowat stood up for this province, stood up for the people of this province and was successful.

We don't see those sorts of people in the Liberal government now: people who will actually stand on principles, stand on knowledge. No, we see them standing on talking points, we see them standing on slogans, we see them hiding behind headlines. That's what we see of this Liberal government: hiding behind headlines. It's an unfortunate time when the people of this province, who have placed their faith and confidence in elected representatives, cannot count on them to actually listen to them. It is an atrocious abrogation of authority.

I know that members on the Liberal side view themselves as politicians first, and they are politicians. They're also legislators. They are legislators first. They're supposed to be legislators first and politicians second. "Legislators" means that you understand legislation, that you understand the law, that it's not just a game of deaf, dumb and blind and who plays the good spin from the Liberal side. The debates in this House on these important bills have diminished with time. They have diminished since this Liberal government has grasped second-term rot and has no direction.

But I should also add that there is another element to being a Liberal backbencher and a Liberal member. Although they don't engage in discussion and debate, they don't have a whole lot of knowledge about constitutional responsibilities and their reality is, of course, skewed, they are very friendly when it comes to fundraisers. They have a lot of friends over there that they like to listen to—maybe not a lot. But they're good at fundraising.

They really, really treat these fellows well, exceptionally well, have them come and become involved with their agencies, boards and commissions, become chairmen and vice-chairmen, get nice per diems and nice expense accounts. We saw that through eHealth; that's the other one where the Liberal government has refused to allow the people fired from eHealth to come before the public accounts committee, right? They refuse to allow this. That's another part of the Liberal "Put your hands over your ears and eyes. Don't allow those who do know what happened to testify before a committee of this House."

I hope you all have a good, good Christmas when you get home December 23. I know we will. It will be interesting to see what's under the Christmas tree for all those Liberal consultants and fundraisers this year. I'm sure the Liberal Christmas tree will be stacked high and they will actually be able to buy a lot more with this extra

$3 billion they are taking out of people's pockets, another $3 billion to buy presents for their friends and their consultants.

I'd love to be a fly on the wall at some of these Liberal meetings they've held. We've heard the Premier talk about his meetings, how they've gone out there and they've had all these discussions. But if you really want to engage in discussion, the Premier has got the answer for everybody.

What did the Premier say this week? "If you really want to get engaged for the public, if you really want to get involved and participate in discussion of the important things of this government, phone up talk radio." That's what he said. "Phone up talk radio. Don't bother talking to my backbench. That's just a waste of time. Call up talk radio and then you'll get some interesting discussion. Talking to my backbench, well, that's just useless. Phone up CFRA in Ottawa, phone up CFRB and get involved in some real good discussion with somebody who actually wants to listen, because the Liberal Party doesn't want to listen. Why should we do that? We'll get on there and do our talking points after. Lowell Green, he likes to listen; Bill Carroll, he likes to listen. But Liberals—pardon me."

Even the Premier has shown and demonstrated to everybody in this province that it is a waste of time to talk to his party, an absolute waste of time. I'm sure as the Premier escalates and enunciates his commitment to democracy, the next time somebody asks him about discussing and debating topics he will say, "If you really want to get involved in democracy and discuss and debate things, send a tweet to the twits." That's what he'll say. "Get on Twitter. That's where your real discussion is, right? You don't even have to wait to dial up and phone a radio show. Just get on your little BlackBerry and send a tweet to the twits, and that's all that's required, right? That's democracy." He'll probably say, "I don't even know if they know how to operate those twits or tweeters, or whatever they're called, but send it to them anyway, for all the good it's going to do."

I'm going to say that this Liberal government—I have empathy for you on the backbench. I do. It must be an absolute burden and fearsome to go back to the riding and say, "Well, phone up talk radio. That's what the boss said. Don't bother calling me at the constituency office. Just phone talk radio. That's what the boss said, you know, and I have to do what the boss said." That's the Liberal way.

It must be an absolute burden on you ladies and gentlemen that you go back and you know you've done and accomplished nothing. You've done and accomplished nothing in your time here. That would drive me to distraction. It would probably put me into a depression mode if I knew that nothing that I did was ever—that you didn't do anything. Well, maybe you listened to talk radio and saw what people had to say. Or maybe I turned on the BlackBerry and saw what tweets were coming in today. But I really do have empathy and I do feel for the burden that people in the Liberal Party must carry.

But there is a saying that I think you should all take with you: The truth will set you free. Speak truthfully. Speak honestly. Stand up and show the people in your ridings that you are a representative, that you are a legislator, that you're not just a political seal or a political lamb, that you actually have some substance there for him and that you actually can provide value someday if you just stand up and do it. It will set you free and you'll feel better for it. Part of the best Christmas present that you guys will get this year is that advice: Stand up and show people who you really are. Show them that you're not just marching to the tune of the pooh-bah, that your residents don't have to call talk radio to get a message to you, that you will actually invite them in and talk to them and listen; and hear their concerns about this massive tax contract grab that you're doing, how it's going to harm people when you take $3 billion more out of their pockets.

Wouldn't it be a blessing for you guys and girls on the other side to actually invite people in, hear their stories and share their reality with them? Understand what you are doing and that maybe the grand pooh-bah's way is not the only way. Maybe there is another way. That way is called being honest. That way is shown by listening to people. It's demonstrated by opening yourselves up to other perceptions and engaging in that fulsome discussion, not just a time allocation motion and a tax grab. Tax grabs and time allocations: The two hallmarks, the stock and trade, of this Liberal government are time allocation and tax grabs. Time allocations and tax grabs—stock and trade of this Liberal Party.

There really is little value in discussing anything with these fellas until they get that Christmas spirit and listen to that Christmas advice.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am pleased to introduce the family of our page Christopher Dabner from Burlington today. We have with us Katie and Pat Dabner, and Tony Dabner, Christopher's uncle. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Today is Advocis Day at Queen's Park yet again. We have over 60 members from the Financial Advisors Association of Canada who have come to meet with all of us, all MPPs from all three parties.

Joining us today in question period is Kris Birchard, who is the chair of the board of Advocis; Greg Pollock, the president and CEO of Advocis; Roger McMillan, the chair of the Ontario committee of Advocis; and my good friend Terry Zive. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to question period.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to introduce to the House the former mayor of Hearst, the former member

for Cochrane North and, I think, the best Minister of Northern Development and Mines the province has ever seen: René Fontaine. Welcome, René.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to welcome two financial advisers and friends from Ottawa who are here today on behalf of Advocis. We have David McGruer of Dundee Wealth and Geoff Carter of Freedom 55. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would like to welcome three folks from the Hastings-Prince Edward cancer society unit—they're in the west members' gallery—Jeff Brace, Stirling Johnson and Heather Gray. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce a regional director of the Canadian Cancer Society from Sudbury, Connie Innes, who is with us today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to welcome all the people who are here today with the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, for their educate your MPP day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Joining us in the members' west gallery, on behalf of page Vanessa Van Decker, are her mother, Maureen Madigan, and family friend Cavalena Cawthray. Welcome.

TAXATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Thursday, November 19, the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman, raised a point of privilege relating to the consideration of Bill 218. I thank the member for providing me with written notice of his point of privilege, as required by the standing orders. Having read his submission carefully and listened to his arguments and those put by the government House leader, Ms. Smith, and the member for Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Bisson, I am now prepared to rule.

As the member for Leeds–Grenville stated, privilege deals with the specific ability of individual members, and the House as a collective, to carry out their parliamentary duties.

In the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, chapter 3, the rights and immunities of individual members, and the rights of the House as a collective, are clearly set out as follows:

Members' individual privileges include:

—freedom of speech;

—freedom from arrest in civil actions;

—exemption from jury duty;

—exemption from attendance as witnesses;

—freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

As a collective, the privileges of the House include:

—the power to discipline its members;

—the regulation of its own internal affairs;

—the authority to maintain the attendance and service of its members;

—the right to institute inquiries and to call witnesses and demand papers;

—the right to administer oaths to witnesses;

—the right to publish papers containing defamatory material.

In order for a finding that a prima facie case of privilege has been made out, the Speaker must be satisfied that sufficient support exists for the proposition that one of these heads of privilege has been breached.

In his point of privilege, the member for Leeds–Grenville argued that the members individually, and the House collectively, have been obstructed in the performance of parliamentary duties and functions for two reasons: first, that Bill 218 contains provisions that allow for the government to enter into an agreement that will be binding beyond the next general election, and second, that the government is refusing to allow for full public hearings on Bill 218.

Let me first deal with the issue of a long-term agreement between one government and another. This is not an unusual occurrence. Indeed, the free trade agreement comes immediately to mind. In that case, the government of Canada signed a long-term agreement with the government of the United States. Governments have in fact signed agreements with private interests that are binding in the long term. As the government House leader suggested, the 407 contract is a case in point.

In the case at hand, the government of Ontario and the government of Canada have entered into an agreement to harmonize the provincial retail sales tax with the national goods and services tax. The machinery required to do this is provided for in the amendments to the Ontario Retail Sales Tax Act, set out in schedule R of the bill. While the fulfillment of this bilateral agreement is dependent upon passage by Ontario and the federal Parliament of the necessary legislation, it is the agreement itself that contains commitments about the duration of the accord, not the bill.

The Retail Sales Tax Act could again come before the House for further amendment at a future time in another session of Parliament, including even the complete repeal of any changes made at this time as a result of Bill 218. There is nothing in the bill itself that prohibits a future government from proposing alterations to the Retail Sales Tax Act or renegotiating an existing extraparliamentary agreement. While doing so might constitute an abrogation of the agreement and could carry political or legal consequences, this is not something that is of procedural consequence to this Legislature.

The member for Leeds–Grenville may be of the opinion that the terms of the particular agreement are an affront to democracy. However, the fact that he holds this opinion does not make it a matter of privilege. The heads of our privilege, which I just enumerated, are quite specific. Nothing about our current circumstances offends any of those heads. Members are debating the bill; no one has been obstructed from doing so. The key point is that this Legislature is being presented with a specific proposal and has the opportunity and the power to grant or deny it.

As to the second point the member makes, being the asserted refusal of the government to allow public hear-

ings on the HST legislation in communities across Ontario, I have before me no evidence that this is the case. Indeed, the bill has yet to pass second reading, and as yet no referral or terms of referral have been made.

However, even if there were such evidence, under the rules of this House, the government has the ability to put to the House a motion that allocates time for each stage of the consideration of a bill. The House, in turn, has the ability to pass or defeat such a motion.

While there could very well be certain provisions contained in a time allocation motion that might make it out of order, the allotment of more or less time to committee consideration of a bill would not likely be one of them. Indeed, we have many examples of little or no time being allotted to committee consideration of a bill by way of a time allocation motion properly put, debated and decided by this House.

There is no head of privilege that dictates the extent to which public hearings must be held, as long as they are determined within the rules of this House.

For these reasons, I cannot find that a prima facie case of privilege has been made out.

The member further indicated that if I am unable to find a prima facie case of privilege, he would then argue that a contempt of the House has occurred. Once again, on the same grounds, I see no support for that conclusion.

I thank all members for their submissions on the matter.

The member for Nepean–Carleton has given me notice of her intention to raise a point of privilege. Her point relates to the applicability of provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act to Bill 218, an Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts.

I am prepared to rule on the matter without hearing further from the member for Nepean–Carleton, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

There is substantial precedent, and universal support, for the notion that the Speaker does not have the authority to deal with legal or quasi-legal issues and will not deal with requests for an interpretation of the law.

From a procedural perspective, Bill 218 is properly before the House at the present time, and whether there are any legal issues of the nature the member raises would need to be decided by the courts. The question is not one for the Speaker to decide.

The member has therefore not made out a prima facie case of privilege.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. On November 9, your government, behind closed doors, signed something called the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement, or CITCA. On page 69 of this HST agreement that your government signed, it says you locked the province into your HST grab for a "period of five years from the implementation date." Premier, what in the world gives you the moral authority to lock the province into your greedy tax grab until 2015?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to begin by welcoming the leader of the official opposition back to the Legislature.

If the honourable member is asking us whether we are absolutely committed to this initiative, whether we are determined to cut taxes for Ontarians effective January 1, whether we are determined to take 90,000 Ontarians off the income tax rolls effective January 1 and whether we're prepared to move ahead and create 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians, the answer from this government is yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: No, I've been very clear and the Premier so far has refused to answer questions about this CITCA deal—these details he has tried to bury since signing the agreement on November 9.

Premier, you have no mandate to bring in this record sales tax grab. Premier, you campaigned against tax increases and now are bringing a $3-billion sales tax grab on the backs of Ontario families and retirees. You're refusing to consult the taxpayers who will have to foot the bill and now we find out that you're trying to lock the province in until 2015.

Premier, correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't page 69 say that no further exemptions can be made until after July 1, 2015?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, if my honourable colleague is questioning our commitment to move ahead with this package of tax reforms, then he's wasting time. I think the real question that weighs heavily on the minds of Ontarians is: If my honourable colleague is so adamantly opposed to our package of tax reform, then why won't he, at a minimum, send a letter to the Minister of Finance in the federal government asking him to put a stop to the HST? Why will he, more importantly, not stand up in this Legislature and say that, should he earn the privilege of serving Ontarians as their Premier, he will put a stop to the HST immediately?

He won't say that. He won't send that letter because he believes in the HST. He believes in our plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

The honourable members will come to order. The member from Willowdale will come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Sadly, after six years in office, Dalton McGuinty is increasingly out of touch with middle-class families and retirees in the province of Ontario. In answering a very direct question about his backroom deal that tries to lock the province in till 2015, this Premier is increasingly slippery in his responses to the official opposition.

Here's the bonus—and tell me if I'm wrong, Premier. On page 69 of your agreement, you negotiated a $4.3-billion poison pill that would punish any government that tries to break your CITCA deal. Premier, you have no moral authority for this sales tax grab. You seem to be afraid of full public consultations, and now we find out about your backroom deal.

Premier, you really have only one way to proceed. Will you hold full, province-wide public hearings in Kitchener, London, Sarnia, North Bay and Ottawa? Will you do the right thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Education. The member from Renfrew.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think Ontarians would be interested in knowing why the leader of the official opposition is not in fact prepared to repeal the HST. It's because he understands that while it's in place in 130 other countries and four of the provinces, at no time and in no way have any of those jurisdictions repealed it.

He knows that it's a plan to create 600,000 more jobs, and he's without a plan of his own when it comes to creating 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians. He knows it's a plan that's going to cut taxes for Ontarians and for our businesses so that they can grow stronger, especially our manufacturing sector. He also knows that there are so many different economists on both sides of the spectrum, business groups and poverty groups that have built a very strong consensus around the need for us to find a way to move forward and embrace our future. He knows that the position he adopts right now is one of clinging to the past. He knows that the responsibility of leadership is to build a bright and promising future. He knows, more than anything else, this is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. Premier, three straight questions on your backroom CITCA deal, and three times you slipped off the hook from answering those direct questions.

Another question: Just two days ago your member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex held a public consultation on the HST, Dalton McGuinty style. To attend her so-called consultation with the Minister of Revenue, guests had to cut a cheque for $50 to her Liberal Party riding association.

Premier, why is it that the public has to pay the Ontario Liberal Party before you'll listen to their views about your greedy sales tax grab?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again I want to—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may not know that so far, in government, we have together hosted over 160 different opportunities to meet with Ontarians, as distinct from fundraisers. We do fundraisers, and so do the opposition. But there have been 160, and more, opportunities that we put in place to meet with Ontarians, to consult with them and hear from them on this.

One of the questions that comes back to us time and time again is, if the official opposition remains so very much opposed to the HST, then why won't they commit to repealing it? I can't answer that question for Ontarians, but I'm sure that my honourable colleague would want to do that right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, the Premier says they've had 106—

Interjections.

Interjection: Who's the government? Are we the government or are you?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They don't know.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nepean will please come to order, and the member from Halton.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you claim you've had 106 public hearings. That must have done wonders for Liberal Party coffers if they're charging 50 bucks a head.

I want to ask you, what has happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in the Premier's chair? First you tell Ontario families that if they don't like your HST sales tax grab, they should call talk radio or hang around the water cooler. Now we find out option two: Make a donation to the Ontario Liberal Party and then you can have your say.

Premier, I'll ask you again: Why do your so-called consultations require a donation to the Ontario Liberal Party?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's just silly; I can't think of a more apt word.

I want to bring to the attention of my colleague something he has been saying in the last few months, even: "To be clear, I believe that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate sets of taxes and policies and to collect two separate groups of sales taxes." He also said, "In the manufacturing sector, the problem with the PST is it cascades, so every step along the way there's a tax on tax on tax, which raises the cost of goods and particularly punishes exporters. So we understand how [a harmonized sales tax] can help the economy."

Again, we're wondering: If he's so adamantly opposed to this particular initiative of the HST, why did he support it just until recently and why does he refuse to repeal it?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: That tells you a lot about what happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in office. Premier, your gut reaction—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yesterday was such a good question period. It was quiet.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Transportation is not being helpful.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You can tell a lot about what's happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in office. Premier, quite frankly, you should have gotten up on your feet and said that what the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex did was wrong. It's wrong to charge $50 to have a consultation on the HST. It's wrong to fill your Liberal Party coffers with your so-called consultations, and it's wrong that the Premier doesn't have the courage to call for full public hearings across the province of Ontario, because I don't believe that Ontario families and retirees should have to cut a cheque to the Ontario Liberal Party to have their say about this greedy tax grab.

I'll ask you again, Premier: Will you have full, open and free public consultations for families across the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It has been said that if the facts are on your side, then you argue the facts; if the law is on your side, then you argue the law; but if neither are on your side, then you holler. The official opposition has been doing a lot of hollering lately, and I can understand why.

Speaker, I want to bring to your attention that the honourable Leader of the Opposition held public meetings in North Bay, London, Nepean and Markham and charged $25 on every occasion for people to attend.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will come to order. Minister of Transportation, Minister of Finance and Minister of Municipal Affairs.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier likes to pretend that the HST is already a done deal. Despite widespread opposition from Ontario families, the Premier has said he wants the HST bill rammed through the Legislature before Christmas. But he alone cannot bring in the HST; he needs his friends in Ottawa to pass legislation to make the HST possible. Why is the Premier plowing ahead with this bill, refusing to hold province-wide public hearings when it hasn't even passed the minority Parliament in Ottawa?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank my honourable colleague for the question, and I want to remind her, as well, of why it's so important for us to work together and move forward with this package of tax reforms.

There's a lot of mythology and fiction connected with this particular initiative, but I think the facts, as I like to say, are not unimportant. Here are a few facts: Our plan represents the biggest tax cut ever in the history of our province: we're cutting personal income taxes for 93% of Ontarians, effective January 1; we're taking 90,000 low-income Ontarians off the tax roll; we're cutting business taxes to make our businesses stronger, but especially the manufacturing sector; and finally, it's important to understand that our tax reforms are going to cost the government $3.4 billion during our first four years, but we think it's very worthwhile investment in creating jobs for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, here's a fact for the Premier: Even senior members of the federal Liberal Party are clearly uncomfortable with the HST, and Conservative MPs are scrambling as fast as they can to get away from it. Their constituents have all told them that they don't want to pay more to get a haircut or to fill up the gas tank just to fund another corporate tax giveaway. Will the Premier today tell Ontarians what he plans to do if the Parliament actually rejects the HST?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm confident that the government of Canada will respect the wishes of the people of Ontario as expressed through their duly elected provincial legislature. I have confidence in that.

Rather than speculate on that, let's talk about the facts: 140 countries and four provinces have already adopted the HST or a VAT, and nobody has ever reversed it, including the NDP in Nova Scotia. They're not going to reverse it, because it works; it strengthens the economy. Here's another fact: When they brought the HST into the Maritimes, it led to a 12% increase in business investment, which we think is very important. Here's another fact: Economists from the right and the left endorse our plan—I wish my honourable colleague would acknowledge that. As well, poverty groups and business groups have endorsed our plan. It's a solid plan, and we are looking to moving forward with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, one of the things this Premier should do, as Premier of this province, is acknowledge that the people have a right to tell him what they think about this in public hearings. I'll tell you what they're telling the people of this House: that now is not the time to ask them to pay 8% more on their hydro, on their home heating, on their gasoline and even on their Christmas trees. They're telling the members of Parliament the same thing, and it looks like MPs are actually listening. Why doesn't the Premier do the same and apply the brakes to this tax that nobody wants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I haven't heard from a single Ontarian who is not eager for us to put in place a plan to create 600,000 more jobs—not one. I haven't heard from an Ontarian, either, who would not be interested in any kind of a plan, positive or otherwise, but at least a plan of some kind, either coming from the NDP or the Conservatives, that would create jobs.

We know what they are against. We know that they find security in clinging to a past that is not going to come back to us, but they don't have a plan to build a stronger Ontario for the future. We do. We've got a plan that's going to create 600,000 jobs over the course of the next 10 years. It's a plan that's going to lead to $47 billion more in investment in new businesses, and it's going to increase our incomes by up to 9%. We think it's a solid plan; it's a plan worthy of the ambitions of the people of Ontario. We're going to move forward with it on their behalf.

1100

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. The McGuinty Liberal tax scheme is simply unfair, and people want the government to hear that. Marion Calvert tells us this: "It's not fair when the economy is slow and people are out of work."

This tax scheme hasn't even passed the federal Parliament. The government can actually take some time to listen to the people of this province. Why won't the Premier do just that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The individual referenced by my honourable colleague talks about work, and that is what this package of tax reforms is fundamentally all about. It's about creating 600,000 more jobs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Peterborough will come to order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And the members from Lanark and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound as well—and Simcoe North. I can keep going. I'll just stand here. I'm quite happy to stand here. The pages will be a little delayed for their lunch. But it is getting a little difficult to hear, and I would just ask all the members to be respectful of one another and respectful of our guests who we have in the gallery.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that it is only too easy for us in this rarefied atmosphere here at Queen's Park to lose sight of the concerns on the front lines of Ontario. I know that my honourable colleague has in fact come into contact with families that have experienced job loss. She has in fact travelled through communities, whether in the north or southern Ontario, which have been the subjects of terrible devastation as a result of the global recession. She knows that the single most important thing that we can do is put in place a plan to create jobs. That's what this plan is all about: It's about building a bright future for the people of Ontario by creating 600,000 more jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Anybody can buy a study, the way this government did, to put numbers together that are simply not corroborated by anybody else on earth.

But I think what this Premier needs to know is that across Ontario, people feel like this tax is being imposed on them, imposed by Dalton McGuinty and imposed by Stephen Harper, and they haven't even been asked their opinion.

Sandra Dawson of Port Dover says this: "How can a single mother who takes pride in making ends meet on her own without government funding and striving to get ahead believe the McGuinty government is considering her best interests when contemplating the implementation of the harmonized tax?"

Instead of telling people what to think, why doesn't this government, why doesn't this Premier at least take the time to listen to what people want?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am pleased to get the question on behalf of that particular individual, who I believe is a single mum. Let me tell you about some of the things that we're doing to help Ontarians. In addition to cutting taxes for 93% of Ontarians, 2.9 million families and individuals are going to get our new annual, permanent tax credit—$260 per person. There are also transition payments that we have in place. For the typical family, it's $1,000; for the typical individual, it's $300.

Beyond that, taxes will not change for 83% of consumer purchases, notwithstanding the bleak picture that my honourable colleague continues to paint. We have been very deliberate in ensuring that we are fair to Ontarians, but particularly to those in the low-income levels so that they in fact come out ahead as a result of our package of tax reforms.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before the last election, this Premier denounced the policies of the federal Conservatives. He said that harmonization may be Harper's agenda, but it wasn't his.

Sally Stewart writes this: "I can't afford any more taxes. We are in a recession as well and taking a hit.... We work on a budget each month and I can tell you it is not a budget that allows a lot of the extras."

My question again to this Premier: Will he open his ears and agree to hearings today so that he can hear the concerns, the opinions and the worries of the people of this province who are about to get whacked with a huge tax increase?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to tell my honourable colleague that we gave a tremendous amount of thought before we decided to move ahead with this package of tax reforms. It is a dramatic departure from the past, admittedly; it represents a dramatic series of tax cuts for people and for our businesses; and it brings in a harmonized sales tax. We heard from economists on both sides of the spectrum. We heard from business groups, poverty groups and the like. We listened long and hard to all of those groups and individuals. In the end, we decided to do this because we honestly believe it is the right thing for us to do. It is the best thing we can do to strengthen this province, to secure a bright future for our kids and, most importantly, to create 600,000 more jobs. You talk

to families, you talk to businesses, you talk to Ontarians generally: It's about jobs, jobs, jobs. That's what this plan is all about: 600,000 more jobs.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question is to the Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek would best be seated in his own seat if he's going to be interjecting. The member from Peterborough will come to order as well.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order, and if he continues—I am extending a warning to the member from Hamilton East.

The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Premier, do your so-called HST consultations with Liberals such as Maria Van Bommel offer seniors' discounts?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member knows that we refer to members by their riding names.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'll repeat the question. Do your so-called HST consultations with Liberals such as the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex offer seniors' discounts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is something that we have sadly come to expect now of the official opposition. I think, as I like to say, the facts are not unimportant. There is a distinction between a fundraiser—we host fundraisers and they host fundraisers. Those are not dirty things; those are important things to support a strong democracy. Above and beyond that, we have in fact collectively hosted over 160 separate meetings with various groups right across the province, open to the public, in order to engage Ontarians in a conversation about our package of tax reforms, including the HST. My honourable colleagues opposite know that. I just wish they would admit it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Premier, while you've been consulting with everyone who would slip the Liberal Party a $50 donation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I withdraw it.

Premier, 86% of seniors who belong to the Canadian Association of Retired Persons said they want province-wide public hearings. Most of these taxpayers live on fixed incomes. Many won't benefit from an income tax cut. They don't have $50 to buy access to Liberal members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I withdraw.

Will you hold committee hearings in Brantford, Guelph, London, Kitchener, Peterborough, Ottawa, and Cornwall and let seniors make their views known free of charge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I get the sense there's some kind of a theme emerging here. The official opposition is nothing if not creative, and they enjoy trafficking in fictions.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I stand up; the Legislature goes silent. I sit down; the opposition raises the tone. I would just remind the members again that we have always accepted some interjection in this place, but I do want to be able to hear both the question and the answer.

Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is a final warning for the member from Lanark.

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: With respect to seniors, we were particularly concerned about the impact of our tax reforms on seniors. They will disproportionately benefit from our personal income tax cut, from our new annual tax credit of $260 per person. They will also benefit from the expansion of our property tax credit, which is something my honourable colleagues opposite voted against. But as I say, we've been very mindful of the needs of our seniors as we move forward and we are very confident that in fact seniors in the middle- and low-income brackets are overwhelmingly going to come out ahead as a result of our tax changes.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My questions is to the Premier. Twenty years after a federal resolution to end child poverty, Campaign 2000 reports today that one in nine children in Ontario is growing up in poverty; 120,000 children rely on prepackaged and processed food from food banks; and families on social assistance struggle to get by on incomes $5,600 below the poverty line. After six years in government, this is in fact the McGuinty government legacy.

We must surmise that the Premier is satisfied with the current levels of child and family poverty in Ontario. Is the Premier satisfied?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to speak in this Legislature. First I want to thank Campaign 2000 for their report and their continued advocacy on behalf of the too many children who live in poverty.

Campaign 2000 has been a key partner for us as we have developed our poverty reduction strategy. I had the opportunity to meet with them last week; I met with Jacquie Maund and her Campaign 2000 colleagues to

discuss their report. At its heart, what their report demonstrates is that Ontario is moving in the right direction to support Ontario's children and youth living in poverty. That's why we developed the poverty reduction strategy and focused on kids in the first place, setting an ambitious target of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years.

The report tells us we're on the right pathway. Yes, there is more to do. I look forward to continuing the work that my predecessor, Minister Matthews—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The McGuinty government likes to talk big on poverty, but its real attitude is that poor families can wait—wait a year for a social assistance review that has never happened, wait two years for a low-income dental program that isn't happening, wait three years for an affordable housing strategy that isn't happening and wait five years for a 25% reduction in child poverty that you're never going to meet. Why is this government content to let struggling families languish in poverty when it gives profitable corporations tax cuts right away?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It's unfortunate that the member opposite didn't take the time to read the report wherein the writers wrote, "In December of last year, the Ontario government fulfilled an election promise and took the significant step of setting out a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario with a target to reduce the rate of child poverty by 25%....

"With all-party approval of the Poverty Reduction Act in May, tackling poverty is now a permanent part of government business."

And in that vein, we accelerated the Ontario child benefit from $600 per child to $1,100 two years ahead of schedule in the 2009 budget. That is making a significant difference for Ontario families. We invested $200 million to implement full-day early learning in September 2010 and $300 million the following year.

Every single day, we take steps forward to make sure that we will reach our target, a historic target that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ANTI-SMOKING PROGRAMS

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Promotion de la santé. Today, the Canadian Cancer Society is here at Queen's Park to lobby politicians. In June, the society and other partners in the fight against tobacco raised concerns over $17 million in cuts to smoke-free Ontario and the Ministry of Health Promotion's move to an integrated model to fight tobacco. The minister's response to their concerns was: "There may not be evidence to support integration, but we're going to do it anyway and we may be able to tackle tobacco from this perspective." Why, on an issue so important to the health of Ontarians, is the Minister of Health Promotion cutting an evidence-based program that is working, that is producing results, and gambling on a bargain-basement program that she says herself is not supported by evidence?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: I thank the member opposite for her question. Our government is certainly committed to our Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the smoke-free Ontario agenda.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation that we have in North America. Under that legislation, we have numerous initiatives that are aimed at targeting young people, to prevent them from starting to smoke and to help them quit smoking. We are committed to helping people to quit because we recognize that smoking is an addiction. That is why we have cessation programs and a number of other different programs aimed at getting people to quit smoking, raising awareness and educating people about the dangers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: The government can be committed in many different ways, but when you move from an evidence-based program that is providing results to one that is not evidence-based, I question that judgment.

Next week will mark the one-year anniversary of Bill 124, the ban on sale of single-wrapped, candy-flavoured cigarillos that are so popular among youth. The Canadian Cancer Society was ecstatic last December when this bill passed. It received royal assent. But today, people in Ontario with a buck in their pocket can buy those cigarillos because the McGuinty government has not acted upon this law.

Minister, if you wait for the federal government to take action, these products will remain on store shelves well into the summer of 2011. You are planting the seeds to kill more Ontarians. Why is the Minister of Health Promotion so afraid to take action on cigarillos?

Hon. Margarett R. Best: First of all, I would like to remind the member opposite that since this ministry was created, we have invested approximately $37 million in programs to prevent children and youth from starting to smoke. We have also banned the display of tobacco products throughout the province that can induce children to smoke. The government has supported this amendment to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to restrict the sale of flavoured cigarillos, and I would like to thank our member from Brant, who was instrumental in getting this bill passed as well.

It is our goal to move forward and promote a smoke-free Ontario. We intend to move forward and continue to work with our young people to encourage them not to smoke and to raise awareness in this province about the dangers of smoking. We will continue as a government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Last week I had the

opportunity to read an article in the Ottawa Sun regarding an issue that is brewing in the Lanark Highlands. The MPP and MP from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington have issued a referendum ballot to many residents in the area over a water and sewer issue in the riding. From what I gathered in this article, this is a dispute over how to proceed and how best to address the needs in the communities involved.

My question relates to the topic of referendums on municipal issues. Many residents in my riding have been asking how an issue can be voted on through a referendum, and what the procedure is. With municipal elections set to start in the new year, what is the procedure to have a referendum question on a ballot?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the member for the question. I too read the article and was disappointed that a member of the opposition, along with a federal MP, would actually go out and interfere in a municipal issue in Lanark Highlands. The rules are very clear for a municipal referendum. It has to be instituted by the municipality or by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, must be a "yes" or "no" question, and is presumed to bind council.

The so-called referendum in question doesn't even address the issue of secrecy. In fact, the MPP and the member of Parliament on their ballot have said clearly, "Please leave your name and address at the bottom of the ballot." What kind of a referendum is that?

The local municipal leaders have unanimously condemned the interference on the part of the MPP from Lanark and the federal member of Parliament. I tell them: Stay out of the business of those municipalities who are doing good work for the people of Lanark county.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I appreciate that clarification on that sham. It's useful and will be helpful to me in explaining the issue to residents of my riding in the coming year.

There is more and more talk of the coming municipal election, the first since our government was re-elected in 2007. You've been the Minister of Municipal Affairs for two years, doing an outstanding job at a time of significant upheaval and uncertainty, as we have all tried to steer through a global economic crisis. Municipalities have struggled like many other sectors to meet the needs of their communities. They are looking for a partner, a good partner—a partner that works with them. As you know, it's just not about financial support; it's about meeting their needs.

I have heard the minister talk before in this House about the positive relationship our government has with municipalities, and not doing in municipalities the way the former government did. What are the concrete steps you have taken to strengthen this relationship?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm proud of the work we've done. We consult with the municipalities, we don't surprise them like the previous government, and we've uploaded a number of costs from the local property tax base to the province. By the time that the uploads take place, for instance, in Lanark county, that county will save close to $4 million.

I continue to be concerned about inappropriate behaviour on the part of the member from Lanark. Warden Paul Dulmage said of the ballot, "The ballot is ill-conceived and doesn't address the questions adequately. The issue is about safe drinking water, public health and economic development."

In a letter to the Leader of the Opposition, Warden Dulmage further stated, "Lanark county council was shocked and appalled that an elected representative, Mr. Randy Hillier ... would attempt to undermine the local municipal democratic process and decision."

And the Perth—

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: The mayor of Perth said that he had "great concern" about the interference of the member from Lanark—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's a personal attack that you allowed to occur.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A personal attack on a member, Speaker—they called for a point of order on that.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Why did Rita Burak, the new eHealth CEO, seek legal advice about whether evidence of what she called "inappropriate practices" should be turned over to the OPP?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I would like to do is talk about eHealth, because I think it's very, very important that we all acknowledge how critically important eHealth is to the future of our health care system in Ontario. We're moving forward, as quickly as we can, in a responsible way to bring Ontario to the e-health world that we need to embrace.

We are having some very important experiences through the H1N1 vaccination process, where we are seeing first-hand that doctors who have electronic medical records are able to immediately identify those patients in their roster who are eligible for the first phase of the sequencing program. We saw how eHealth really did make our health care system stronger. It supported people through this pandemic. That's just one example of many that demonstrate how important eHealth is to the future of our health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, I would address my question to the Premier. This is a serious issue that requires an actual answer.

According to Ms. Burak, the legal advice she received was that "there was not a sufficient case" to turn over evidence to the OPP. For weeks you've been saying the auditor saw no evidence of fraud or criminal activity, but

Ms. Burak found something that she was so convinced was evidence that she got a legal opinion.

Premier, since you've scrapped the public accounts hearings and are blocking a public inquiry, we can only ask you: Why wasn't the evidence turned over to the OPP?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Rather than engage in speculation, I think it's important to reflect on the progress we have made on eHealth and, more importantly, where we're going to go in the future.

We've got thousands of Ontarians now who are engaged in a pilot program for ePrescribing. This is a critically important component of our eHealth strategy where the physician directly connects with the pharmacist without giving a paper prescription order to the patient. We know that that is a safer process. We know that it cuts down on fraud. That's the kind of example of things we have to continue to move forward on.

We have a drug profile viewer in all of our emergency rooms so that emergency room physicians can instantly see what drugs a patient is receiving. That is another example of a safer, better health care system, and we're committed to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The HST is creating a stir in the Premier's own hometown. Ottawa realtors say that the HST will add $1,449 to the cost of purchasing a home. Local home builders agree, saying the HST will have a negative impact on everything from home buying to home renovations. But, in an added twist, the head of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association says that he was told there would be no HST a mere three weeks before it was announced.

My question is very simple: Why would he have been told that, and by whom?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the leader of the third party for the question. When it comes to the real estate industry, I've had a great opportunity to speak with members of the Ontario Real Estate Association and members in my own riding. I remind them that if you're a part of any type of activity where it's going to attract an increase of 8%, for each and every one of those businesses, their cost of business is going down.

It's so important, I say to the members of the opposition, that we make sure consumers understand that the cost of business is going down, let alone that they're getting their personal income tax cuts. People are getting those starting on January 1, if we're able to pass our bill. I look forward to voting for it.

It's important for people to understand the nature of our tax reforms, that the cost of business is going down some $5.3 billion. It's important that consumers understand that, that they go to those businesses and say, "Listen, I understand about the tax, but where's my share of your cost savings?"

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, I'm sure the Ottawa Real Estate Board and the Ontario Real Estate Association reminded this minister about the important role of the real estate industry in economic improvement in this province. I'm sure he didn't listen, though.

Clearly, Ottawa residents and business owners want a say in this Premier's unfair tax scheme. They realize that the HST will make life more expensive for families and present one more obstacle for businesses that are struggling to overcome this recession.

Ottawa residents and business owners agree that the HST is the wrong tax at the wrong time. Why is this Premier muzzling them by refusing harmonized sales tax public hearings in Ottawa?

Hon. John Wilkinson: There is no time to wait to create 600,000 more jobs in the province of Ontario. I say to our friends, and particularly those in real estate, that there are two markets. There is a market where your clients are coming to you because they have to sell their house, because they're being foreclosed, because they've lost their jobs; and there's a market where people are selling their houses because they're building wealth, because they're moving ahead. The most important thing we can do in this province is to give hope to the people who've lost their jobs that there will be a future. That's why I say to the friends in the real estate industry that it is important for us to have the fundamentals in this province correct. It is to have the creation of new wealth, the creation of new jobs. I say to them that that is what has built this province.

They have made a valuable contribution and will continue to make a valuable contribution, but we will make sure that the economic climate in this province is a positive one, where there are people buying houses because they want to, not because they have to.

1130

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Revenue. Minister, recent news very much reflects the behaviour of the official opposition. Yesterday's Belleville Intelligencer ran an article entitled "Hudak Not Our HST Saviour." The article states—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm just going to remind the member of a ruling that I made previously on a couple of statements: Whether you're making allegations either directly or indirectly against a member or a group of members, I just ask that you be cautious in the phrasing of your question.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yes. My apologies, Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition "in the next provincial election, just because he is flapping his gums about how horrible the HST"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I withdraw the comment.

Ontarians need to know that their leaders take this debate seriously—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member from Renfrew to withdraw his comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdrawn.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: The federal Conservatives encouraged Ontario to harmonize tax through a commitment of $4.3 billion. What will the $4.3 billion mean for Ontarians?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Out of respect to the Chair, I do want to remind the people of Ontario that they can go onto the Internet to yesterday's Belleville Intelligencer and they'll see a quite interesting article about the position of the members opposite.

It's important to remember that we've told people that we would not have proceeded with the harmonization of our sales tax, and our massive tax reform and cuts, if it had not been for the historic decision made by Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty to transfer some $4.3 billion to the province of Ontario so that we can take that money in the first year, that year of transition, and put it right into the pockets of consumers. That really had been the historic logjam. That is the reason that the province of Ontario had not been able to move forward. But because we were able to reach that decision, set aside partisan differences and understand what is important—to create 600,000 more jobs in Ontario, $47 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yesterday's National Post stated that "Small businesses ... should generally benefit from the change from a two-tax system," and yesterday's Windsor Star and Ottawa Citizen stated that the "harmonized sales tax set to be introduced by the McGuinty government next June could rapidly improve the province's economic standing."

The HST has the support of groups ranging from leaders in business such as Telus and Bell Canada and is also supported by poverty advocates such as the Daily Bread Food Bank because it will benefit low-income earners and create jobs.

This is a very serious issue dealing with the economic future of Ontario. Minister, whom should Ontarians believe: those who are operating on the ground or those who treat this debate as a joke?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would give an example: Just recently, GE Canada decided to make an investment of some $100 million in the great city of Peterborough. The CEO of GE Canada, Elyse Allan, said that because of the improvement in the business climate right here in Ontario—because of the actions we are taking—her company, which could have invested anywhere in the world, decided to make their largest reinvestment, I think, in the history of their company in Peterborough. That means jobs; jobs to the people in Peterborough. That's exactly why we are doing this.

It is important for people to understand that under our tax reform package, because of the harmonization of our sales tax, we are permanently cutting income taxes for people and for business. For every dollar that we save for businesses, there are $2 of tax cuts for people, and it's going to start on January 1. It's going to start on January 1 because those of us on this side of the House are going to vote in favour of that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. How is it that you're giving $200,000 to the people of the Philippines for disaster relief but you haven't given a nickel to those who suffered through the F2 tornado in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: My ministry has responsibility for the Ontario disaster relief assistance program, also known as ODRAP. The rules have been in place for several decades, including when the honourable member's party was in power. We're following the same rules and criteria for every municipality. Some municipalities, in fact, have benefited from ODRAP because they fit the criteria and others did not.

We sympathize, obviously, with all of those individuals who lost property. Sadly, there was one life that was lost, but we have been there on the ground with my colleagues from the Ministry of Natural Resources to do what we can to help as the government of Ontario. Certain municipalities, regrettably, did not fit into the criteria, and that is why that particular municipality did not benefit.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, recently apple grower Tom Ferri said in the Blue Mountains Courier-Herald, "It feels like a slow boat to China, here... there's been a lot of talk, but no cheques rolling in or hint of that happening."

So I ask you: How can the Premier justify acting so quickly to provide aid to another country when he hasn't even begun to help the people in his own backyard?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just remind the honourable member again that the program in place has certain criteria that have to be met. We look at the ability of a particular municipality to pay for some of the costs. Let me just tell you about some of the jurisdictions where we have been able to help.

Randy Hope, the mayor of Chatham-Kent said, "That is why we declared a state of ... emergency. I am very pleased that the province of Ontario has recognized the extent of the damage."

Haldimand county Councillor Lorne Boyko said, "Of course they didn't promise anything but they were ... interested in hearing what happened here and they were

extremely helpful with outlining the process involved in applying for ODRAP."

The mayor of Oliver Paipoonge, in northern Ontario, in the Timmins Daily Press said, "Many of our municipalities were very hurt ... the province came through so quickly this time...."

We are always on the ground working with our municipal partners. We do what we can with the limited resources we have. I can assure the honourable member, if he has suggestions on how to change the criteria—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PUBLIC INQUIRY LEGISLATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A distinguished group of legal counsel and researchers for past public inquiries delivered a stinging critique of the proposed changes to the Public Inquiries Act. They argued eloquently that the government's proposed changes so profoundly compromise the independence of a public inquiry that it would be very difficult to attract a sitting judge to act as a commissioner.

Why is this government gutting the Public Inquiries Act? What is it that you're trying to hide?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much for the question. We're doing the opposite, actually. What we're trying to make sure of is that the Public Inquiries Act can support inquiries that will deliver the answers to questions that the people of Ontario need on very important issues while fully supporting the independence of the judiciary, within the time needs and within the monetary requirements of the province of Ontario.

There are some who have weighed in with some concerns, and we're taking a look at those concerns and will continue to take a look at those concerns. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that we have a strengthened approach, not a weakened approach. We believe we have it right, but we're going to keep taking a look at the suggestions that are made by others.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: At the heart of the legal counsels' criticism of the proposed changes are provisions that would allow the government to interfere with the commission after the commission has been appointed. These provisions allow the government to terminate an appointed commissioner, revise a commission's mandate and arbitrarily make any other changes it wants after the commission's work is under way. In fact, it's the legal counsels' view that these changes would effectively end the tradition of public inquiries that has served the people of this province so well over so many years.

So I repeat: Why is this government making these anti-democratic changes to the Public Inquiries Act? What is it that you're trying to hide?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: With respect, I take a different position from that outlined by the member. Most of the comments by counsel and others don't use such colourful language. At the end of the day, we want an independent process. The courts have confirmed that governments always have the right—always have the right—to put an end to an inquiry. It is rarely used. All we've done in this act is actually make that transparent by putting it in the act, by confirming what's already there.

Again, we very much respect the comments being made by the former commission counsel and others. We're taking a look at those. At the end of the day, we want a strengthened process. We need to deliver the answers the people of Ontario need and to be respectful of the taxpayers' money.

1140

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. There's no excuse to drink and drive. While most Ontarians obey the rules, this message, it seems, has not reached everyone. This behaviour is unacceptable and it's a concern I hear often from the residents in my riding of Mississauga South.

Recently, I hosted a reception for Smart Serve here at Queen's Park. They're an organization developed to promote and provide information about safe alcohol service, both at work and at home.

It's important to have awareness organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, and Smart Serve working alongside our governments. These groups help educate the public on the consequences of drinking and driving, and how to prevent it.

What is the Ministry of Transportation doing to help reduce the instances of drinking and driving in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much. Excellent question. I applaud the efforts of our safety partners, and that includes MADD Canada, OCCID and our enforcement agencies. They all work very hard to keep drunk drivers off our roads.

As you know, Ontario's roads are the safest in North America. We continue to work hard to keep them that way. For example, this past year we have seen significant increases in spot checks across the province, due to the doubling of our funding to the RIDE program.

That being said, there's always more that can be done, and that is why MTO staff are continuously reviewing current policies, monitoring other jurisdictions and working with our safety partners to determine the best ways to keep Ontario's roads safe.

I look forward to being able to discuss some of these efforts in the supplementary questions, but I can tell you that our partners that we have out there have been indispensable in terms of providing us with good advice and strong—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Each year in Ontario, statistics show that drinking-and-driving collisions are the cause of almost one quarter of all traffic fatalities. The behaviour

of drinking and driving, especially that of repeat offenders, is a learned behaviour. Concerned residents in my riding and, I'm sure, people all across Ontario want to see this behaviour stopped before it begins.

In his first answer, the minister mentioned other initiatives that the government is moving forward with to keep our roads safe. Can the minister tell this House what he's doing to combat drinking and driving on Ontario roads?

Hon. James J. Bradley: We have among the toughest drinking-and-driving sanctions, I think, in all of North America, and that's thanks to the support of all members of this House.

New measures are already in place to seize and forfeit the vehicles of repeat drunk drivers. Effective on May 1, 2009, drivers caught with a blood-alcohol concentration between 0.05 and 0.08, the "warn" range, face longer suspensions of drivers' licences and additional sanctions: for the first instance, three days; for a second instance, seven days and the requirement to take a remedial alcohol education program; and for a third instance, 30 days, the requirement to take a remedial alcohol treatment program, as well as having an ignition interlock condition on their licence for six months.

Both education and prevention are key to the reduction of drinking and driving. That's why in this House we also unanimously passed supportive legislation that requires zero blood alcohol—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question was for the Minister of Children and Youth Services but I will ask the Premier. The parting gift that the now Minister of Health left for children's aid societies across Ontario was a $67-million cut to their budgets.

Dufferin Child and Family Services have had their budget cut by 17.1%. Peel Children's Aid Society will be forced to cut 24 front-line workers. Durham Children's Aid Society have said they would need to cut 63 jobs to balance their budget. Halton is faced with cutting 34 front-line workers. The York Region Children's Aid Society has already laid off 16 front-line workers—and more are expected.

Premier, what's it going to take for your minister to accept her responsibility to protect Ontario's most vulnerable children?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to this question. It's a very important issue.

One of arguably the greatest responsibilities we share is that, through our children's aid societies, when we take children into care, we are effectively acting as their mothers and fathers. I'm not sure there's a greater responsibility any of us might take on during the course of our lives than to act as a parent.

I think it's very fair to say that we have dramatically increased funding levels for our children's aid societies during the course of the past six years. What we want to do now is, through our sustainability commission, work with the children's aid societies to ensure that we have effective and efficient use of that funding. That work will begin very, very shortly.

Funding had been rising far faster than case volume. It's important to understand that since 2003, funding is up over 29% and children in care up less than 1%.

We believe that all of that money—every one of those dollars—is well invested. We want to make sure, through our sustainability commission, that we're getting the best value.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I just want to, upon reflection, refer back to an exchange of questions between the member from Peterborough and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Upon reflection—and this is one of the challenges of a loud chamber and of trying to hear every word—I'm of the opinion that there was a personal attack directed at another member of this Legislature, and I would just ask the honourable member to withdraw his comments, please. I'm specifically asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Jim Watson: I was quoting a letter, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm just asking that you withdraw the comments.

Hon. Jim Watson: If it was inappropriate, I withdraw the quote from the county warden.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you for withdrawing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I need an unequivocal withdrawal.

Hon. Jim Watson: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby–Oshawa has given her notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Health: the reason why evidence of inappropriate practices at eHealth was not turned over to the OPP. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Cambridge has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning consultations regarding the proposed new HST. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Greg Sorbara: It is my pleasure to welcome this afternoon to this House the family of the late Sheila James about whom I will say a little bit more during members' statements. Her husband, Wayde Preston; daughters, Georgina and Ellen Preston; her parents, Bill

and June James; her parents-in-law, Maurice and Donna Preston; her siblings and all the people who are here today to listen to a few words of tribute in honour of Sheila—we welcome you all to this Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JOSEPH BRANT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to make a statement regarding the pending approval of the proposal for redevelopment of the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington.

I want to thank my colleague Christine Elliott, PC critic, for asking questions on this issue to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the deputy minister on November 3 in the Standing Committee on Estimates on my behalf.

Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital hasn't seen any major restructuring changes since the 1970s. That's almost 40 years of stagnant physical change to the hospital. It is critical that the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital proposal move more quickly to approval of their expansion and renewal plans.

Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital was one of the hardest hit by the C. difficile bacterium in the spring and summer of 2008. Included in this renewal of the hospital is an increase of private rooms from 15% to 80%, which will meet the ministry's new design guidelines for infectious disease control.

The request has never been approved. So here we are now, in 2009, six years later, and we still don't have an imminent approval of these plans. I will continue to stand and call for the approval of Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital's restructuring proposal. You know, after waiting 40 years for changes to our hospital, surely the people of Burlington should not have to wait any longer.

RODNEY WATSON

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On October 19, Iraq war veteran Rodney Watson announced that he had been living in sanctuary at Vancouver's First United Church for a month. Rodney remains there today. The 31-year-old is in a self-imposed prison because he was facing deportation to military custody in the United States, despite Canada's Parliament having voted against such deportations.

After completing his first tour of duty in Iraq in 2006, Rodney made the decision that he could not, in good conscience, go back. As Rodney's own words explained, he continues to be disturbed by his participation in this unsanctioned war. Rodney, who is of African-American descent, found the racism of his fellow soldiers unacceptable, whether directed at him or foreign non-combatants.

I speak of Rodney's situation today because most of the US Iraq war resisters who are in Canada and have spoken out publicly live in my riding. Twice, the majority of federal members of Parliament have voted on the initiative of Toronto MP Olivia Chow to direct the government to immediately stop deporting US Iraq war resisters and to create a program to facilitate their staying here in Canada.

I urge all members of this assembly to speak with the members of Parliament who represent your ridings in Ottawa and ask them to oppose the deportation of Rodney Watson and other US Iraq war resisters.

Minister Chan, I urge you to write to your federal counterpart, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, to let him know that the majority of Ontarians, 63%, want US Iraq war resisters to be welcomed as permanent residents.

SHEILA JAMES

Mr. Greg Sorbara: I rise today to pay honour to a woman who has had a profound and permanent impact on many of us in this House and on the public life of our province.

Sheila James was a truly great spirit: a mother, a wife, a partner, a daughter, a sister, a public affairs professional and a brilliant adviser to cabinet ministers and political candidates as well as two Premiers. Sadly, Sheila died last August.

I am also pleased and honoured to announce the establishment of the Sheila James memorial fund through Equal Voice. This is a fund that will advance some of Sheila's greatest passions and interests and support initiatives to promote the election of women to public office across the province and across the country.

Sheila amazed me. Her intelligence was extraordinary. Her analytical skills were unsurpassed. She was a brilliant force for good. She always spoke truth to power, and she had an incredible sense of humour and a deep love for life and family.

Today we pay tribute to the many varied accomplishments in her life and to the fine work that the fund will do to honour her.

We offer her family—her husband, Wayde, and daughters Georgina and Ellen—and all of her admirers our enduring affection and support. We will remember her fondly.

SHEILA JAMES

Mr. John O'Toole: It's an honour to add a few words of tribute to the late Sheila James.

I must admit here that I did not know Sheila James, but I certainly heard of her. Her parents, Bill and June James, live in my riding of Durham, as do Sheila's parents-in-law, Maurice and Donna Preston, her brother-in-law, Marty Preston, and sister-in-law, Paddy Grayhurst. They are with Sheila's husband, Wayde Preston, and daughters Georgina and Ellen in the gallery, as Greg Sorbara said.

Sheila James is cherished as a mother, wife, partner, daughter, sister, colleague and friend. Her life was devoted to making a difference through excellence as a

communications professional. As has been said, she served with Premier David Peterson and Premier Dalton McGuinty, with obvious success.

Toronto Star columnist Jim Coyle said, in a tribute published yesterday, that we "give the world three things.

"We give it our labour.... We give it our example.... Most of all, we give it our children—the greatest expression of faith and hope there is."

Sheila James's parents and family have every reason to be proud, and I know they are. The life of Sheila James will continue to lead and inspire others, and we thank the James and Preston families for their devotion to community and service.

GRK FASTENERS

Mr. Bill Mauro: Twenty years ago, Uli Walther and his family came to Canada and resided in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, my riding, out on Rosslyn Road, and established their business, called GRK Fasteners. They have about 38 employees there and about another 27 in the United States, marketing their product, which is a patented technology. Currently, about 400 million units of that technology come through Thunder Bay. Through the great work of that company and the great product that they patented, they're poised for huge growth, to see that double to almost 800 million units. Their patented screw technology is very much in demand.

But here's the rub: They may have to leave Thunder Bay. The federal government began by applying an 8% tariff on this company and then, with almost no notice, they increased it to 170%, as the company brings in supplies from suppliers around the world.

Aerospace, auto and recreation are exempted, but for some reason, using SIMA, the Special Import Measures Act, as the legislative authority, the CBSA, the Canadian Border Services Agency, has decided to slam this family-owned and -run business in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

CITT, the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, has heard the appeal from this company. We're hoping that they'll pay attention. They will be ruling soon on this. We need the feds to be aware of this unfair application and ensure that they're doing all that they can to ensure that this Ontario-based company gets to continue to stay in Ontario, in Thunder Bay, and continue to employ people.

1510

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to take a moment to recognize the excellent work that the current Minister of Transportation has done on the extension project of Highway 410 to Highway 10 in Brampton. This project, started under Premier Ernie Eves, helps me to get back home to Bognor much faster. Highway 10 is now a four-lane road to Orangeville.

However, I would like to remind the current Minister of Transportation that he cannot stop now. He needs to keep going north of Orangeville to Owen Sound. With the winter approaching, it won't be enough for the minister to simply tell my constituents that they need to be prepared, stay alert and drive according to road and weather conditions.

As he is no doubt aware, improvements to the stretch of Highway 26 between Woodford and Meaford have been in the works for years. But I wonder if the minister realizes that it has been 18 long years since I was promised improvements to the treacherous Bayview Hill area on Highway 26. I hope it won't be another 18 years before something is done.

We also need to see roadwork done on Highway 6 from Durham to Tobermory. This is an especially treacherous stretch of highway to drive on in the wintertime. I know I speak for all my constituents when I call on the current Minister of Transportation to get going with road improvements in that neck of the woods.

The road remains a two-lane highway for its full length up to Tobermory. Highway 6 spans 110 kilometres on the Bruce Peninsula. That's a lot of communities counting on you, Minister, to get the job done like you did for the people of Brampton and Orangeville.

NORWOOD FALL FAIR

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today to speak about an event that I look forward to attending every year, the Norwood fair. Like many other fall fairs, it is attended by thousands of guests each year, because it offers those attending the opportunity to experience rural life and celebrate our rural communities.

This year, I had the pleasure of talking about two talented young people, Ms. Christina Crowley and Mr. Kyle Rivington. Both had the distinct honour of competing in the European Young Breeders Competition in Battice, Belgium. Ms. Crowley and Mr. Rivington were chosen because of their success in previous Holstein Canada, 4-H and EBI competitions. Mr. Rivington, aged 23, took top honours, as well as Overall Top Individual for the show, and Ms. Crowley, aged 22, was fifth overall and won the Grand Champion Showperson award. The competition involved not only showing their cattle but answering questions from judges.

These two young people gained valuable experience in the agricultural sector and made friendships with their European colleagues. These friendships led to a decision to remain in Europe and visit some Holstein herds in Italy. They then made their way to Paris and to Buckingham Palace before travelling to Rome.

Their love for the agricultural community will see these young people evolve into successful adults. They are an example of the value of supporting rural youth in our agricultural programs. Congratulations to Ms. Crowley and Mr. Rivington for a job well done.

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Dave Levac: Yesterday marked the 76th anniversary of Holodmor and the start of Holodomor Education

Week. I had the opportunity to address the opening of Holodomor Education Week yesterday in Toronto. I want to thank Minister Michael Chan for affording me the honour of presenting a memorial plaque on his behalf to the Ukrainian community, and the Premier for allowing me to bring words of greeting from him on behalf of all Ontarians.

A great many Ontarians have no personal experience of forced famine or tyranny and no way of knowing the anguish and chaos that plagued a dictator's time in power. Some, unfortunately, do. Holodomor Education Week is enormously important for those too far removed or too young to understand or even feel Holodomor's significance. Ten million people were starved to death by Stalin.

This is why commemorating Holodomor through the efforts of Ukrainian Canadians and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, and through acts of this House, is so very important for us to relive and understand history.

By joining and working together, the very first ever tri-sponsored private member's bill reached royal assent on April 23, 2009. We made history. For the first time in Canadian history, it was a tri-sponsored bill.

I want to thank MPPs Cheri DiNovo, Frank Klees, Ernie Hardeman, Gerry Martiniuk, Minister Laurel Broten, Minister Donna Cansfield, MPP Khalil Ramal, Minister Chan, Minister Fonseca, and you, Speaker, for your support for this very important day.

I say today, never again. Ukraine remembers; the world acknowledges. Dyakuju.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Joe Dickson: Along with millions of Ontarians, I'm looking forward to the 2015 Pan Am Games, which will be hosted here in Ontario. These games are expected to inject billions into Ontario's economy and create 15,000 new jobs.

To house the 10,000 athletes and officials who will come to compete in the Pan Am Games, new housing development will be built in Toronto. The much-needed new affordable housing will be with us long after the games for all regions.

In my area of Durham region, four municipalities, including Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa, will all host competitions. Even better, my four communities will not incur any capital costs.

Some of the events to be held in Durham region are indoor shooting at the Ajax Community Centre; modern pentathlon, held at the Pickering Horse Centre; outdoor shooting at the Oshawa Skeet and Gun Club; boxing at Oshawa's General Motors Centre; wheelchair basketball at a new build, Abilities Centre, set for completion in 2014; boccia at Durham College in Oshawa; wheelchair tennis at the Iroquois sports park in Whitby; and softball at the Lakefront West Park in Oshawa.

We were fortunate to have a number of key people—including David Peterson, bid chair; Jagoda Pike, CEO; Premier Dalton McGuinty; Health Promotion Minister Margarett Best; and others—at the bid opening, and we congratulate everyone on their success.

VISITOR

Mr. Bill Mauro: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: If I could just introduce, in the members' east gallery, Mike Skube, down here for Advocis Day. He wasn't here a little bit earlier.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That was not a point of order.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Hoskins assumes ballot item number 56 and Mr. Sorbara assumes ballot item number 79.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the November 24, 2009, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. David Orazietti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act with respect to greenhouse gas emissions trading and other economic and financial instruments and market-based approaches / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne l'échange de droits d'émission de gaz à effet de serre ainsi que d'autres instruments économiques et financiers et approches axées sur le marché.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1518 to 1523.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Orazietti has moved the Standing Committee on General Government report regarding Bill 185. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Jeffrey, Linda	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Kular, Kuldip	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Kwinter, Monte	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Phillips, Gerry
Bisson, Gilles	Leal, Jeff	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Levac, Dave	Ramal, Khalil
Chan, Michael	Marchese, Rosario	Ramsay, David
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Rinaldi, Lou
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sousa, Charles
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul	Van Bommel, Maria
Gravelle, Michael	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Hoskins, Eric	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Jaczek, Helena	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Barrett, Toby	Miller, Norm	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Murdoch, Bill	Shurman, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Martiniuk, Gerry	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 12.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for ... haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships"—not newspapers anymore; the Star bought them off—"and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I have signed this also and will send it with Connor.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay ...;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas several paramedics in Simcoe county had their pensions affected when paramedic services were transferred to the county of Simcoe, as their pensions were not transferred with them from" the hospitals of Ontario pension plan and the OPSEU trust "to OMERS, meaning they will receive significantly reduced pensions because their transfer did not recognize their years of continuous service; and

"Whereas when these paramedics started with their new employer, the county of Simcoe, their past pensionable years were not recognized because of existing pension legislation; and

"Whereas the government's own Expert Commission on Pensions has recommended that the government move swiftly to address this issue; and

"Whereas the government should recognize this issue as a technicality and not penalize hard-working paramedics;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Finance support Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson's resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions to OMERS from" the hospitals of Ontario pension plan or the OPSEU trust pension plan.

I obviously agree with this petition and I'm signing it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition from the good people of Sudbury and it's about requesting a PET scan. It goes as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service ...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Karen.

1530

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of proclaiming April Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario. I join my colleague the honourable Antonio Ruprecht in this petition.

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador ... Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, films, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

SALE OF DOMESTIC WINES AND BEERS

Mr. Toby Barrett: One thousand, seven hundred and fifty-two signatures have arrived on petitions from the OKBA, Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association, titled "Say Yes to Beer and Wine Sales in Convenience Stores.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario restricts the sale of beer and wine to the LCBO, a few winery retail stores and the Beer Store, and the three large beer companies are owned by multinationals;

"Whereas other provinces (notably Quebec) have been selling beer and wine in local convenience stores for many years without any harm to the well-being of the public;

"Whereas it is desirable to promote the sale of beer and wine in a convenient manner consistent with a contemporary society;

"Whereas it is essential to support local convenience stores for the survival of small businesses;

"Whereas it is obvious from the current market trends that the sale of wine and beer in convenience stores is not a question of 'if' but 'when';

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Liquor Control Act to permit the sale of beer and wine in local convenience stores to the public throughout the province and to do it now."

I sign the petition.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is, "Stop the Exploitation of Foreign Workers," and it's actually in support of Bill 160, whose author is Michael Colle—the caregiver and worker protection act. It reads as follows—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Can you just read it?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, this is true. I've got it right here; it's right on here.

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support Mr. Michael Colle's bill, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

Since I agree with this petition, of course I'm delighted to sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by George and Julianne Lehmann, which reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes once again on Canada Day 2010 with his new combined GST, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% combined GST will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee,

newspapers and magazines, gas at the pumps, home heating oil and electricity, postage stamps, haircuts, dry cleaning, home renovations, veterinary care, arena ice and soccer field rentals, Internet fees, theatre admissions, massage therapy, funerals, condo fees, courier fees, fast food sold for under $4"—that has been changed, but after the election they'll change it again—"bus fares, golf green fees, gym fees, snowplowing, bicycles, taxi fares, train fares, domestic air travel, accountant and legal services, and real estate commissions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government recognize Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

As I agree with it, I affix my name thereto.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition asking for fairness for Ontario workers.

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at $54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets $4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I affix my name to this petition as I support it.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the hard-working residents in Simcoe county do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over $400,000, fast food under $4, electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than $30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, veterinarian bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I will sign that petition.

RAIL LINE CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is the West Diamond joint venture project. It reads as follows:

"To the Ontario Legislature and the Minister of Transportation.

"Whereas GO Transit's West Diamond project is using a method of pile installation that is ill-suited to an urban environment and causing undue disruption and harm to residents in neighbourhoods on both sides of the railroad tracks;

"Whereas there are other methods of installing piles that would cause minimal disruption and no harm to residents or property;

"Whereas the actions of GO Transit have been inadequate to mitigate the human and property concerns experienced by residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

Stop "the current method of pile installation used in the West Diamond project immediately and engage in a consultation with the community residents to find a mutually agreed upon method that ends the damage to our homes, our quality of life and our physical health."

I'm giving this petition to page Nickolas.

YOUTH ACTION ALLIANCE

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Health Promotion is planning on cancelling funding for the Youth Action Alliance program without looking at its effectiveness in rural Ontario; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance has mobilized youth in the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound area around health issues of importance, including the dangers of smoking, second-hand smoke and illegal cigarettes; and

"Whereas the Youth Action Alliance program is an opportunity for youth in the area to build leadership skills and make valuable contributions to their communities;

"We, the undersigned, ask the Minister of Health Promotion to look at each Youth Action Alliance program on an individual basis and see if it is working effectively and making a difference in its local community; and

"To continue funding those that are working effectively."

I've signed it and I'm going to send it down with Robyn.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I have one more petition today, and I beg your indulgence to read it. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services. It reads as follows:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature..., be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

1540

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit except in a report given to the consumer.

"(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate."

Since this petition is given to me by the Consumer Federation of Canada, I'm glad to sign this as well.

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the past 15 years to over $25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law and medicine pay as much tuition as $20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college or university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

"—reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students;

"—converts a portion of every student loan into a grant; and

"—increases per-student funding above the national average."

I will sign this petition.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm simply looking for some clarification on a ruling made by one of your colleagues in the chair yesterday when a point of order was raised by the member of Oxford dealing with written questions and the requirement under the standing orders in terms of response times.

The member made the point that there had been an interim answer without any specific timeline, and I'm looking for clarification from the Chair regarding this if in the future we are faced with similar situations. There is an interim response made. It's not complied with in terms of the 24 sitting days. How does the order apply in situations like that, where an interim answer or a response has been made? How does the Chair respond when a member stands up on a point of order similar to the one that the member from Oxford stood on yesterday?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for the point of order—and it is a point of order. You raise a good point. I hope it's an issue that the House leaders would be prepared to look at, and perhaps even submit it to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, because according to the standing orders, the filing of that interim answer complies with the 24 days.

I can see your point, that you could just file an interim answer and you are technically in compliance with the standing orders. Unfortunately, it is not an issue that I can rule upon. But I do think it is something worthy of consideration by the House leaders because this is an issue in which it would not matter who is sitting on the government side; this could be an issue. I would be concerned that it could be used in a manner that could delay getting a response to an honourable member.

I will follow up from this with a letter to the House leaders and would encourage the House leaders to have that discussion. Unfortunately, I do not have the ability to

myself send something to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, but perhaps the House leaders would give that consideration, and I thank you for that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On that point of order—

Mr. John Yakabuski: On that point of order, Speaker: In cases like that, could we then refer to the minister in question as the "minister of interim affairs"?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is not a point of order, and I did clarify the ruling that was provided by the Chair yesterday. But I do agree that it is an issue that I trust the members will take a serious look at.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 23, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to resume debate on Bill 218, which is the bill that implements the Dalton sales tax, the HST that we are receiving so many e-mails and so much information from our constituents about.

To be very clear, Mr. Speaker, the reason that the bells have been ringing around the Legislature is because we, as the opposition, are pushing the government to hold public consultations on Bill 218 so that the people of the province can be heard around the province in places like North Bay and London and eastern Ontario and northern Ontario, in Thunder Bay, Owen Sound—

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Collingwood.

Mr. Norm Miller: —Collingwood, all those people who want to be heard.

Recently in Huntsville we had Cyndee Todgham Cherniak, who is a lawyer; she's counsel for international trade law, business law and tax law. She spoke to the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce. That was reported on in the Huntsville Forester, and I can tell you that there were more questions raised from her detailed presentation on the way the McGuinty government is implementing the HST than there were answers. That is all the more reason why we need to have public consultations around the province.

In the short time I have available, I would like to get on the record the comments of a reasonable-sized business, a medium-sized business, that has written to the Premier with their concerns about the HST. They write:

"As a mid-sized company employing 50-plus employees, I would like to voice my displeasure with your government's idea of implementing the HST tax. During a time when it is hard enough to keep our businesses afloat and staff employed, why would you add another tax? Our company is in the service industry; currently we charge GST on our product to our clients and no PST applies as it is a service. Your proposed tax would now add another 8% to the total package that we sell. I have three questions to ask you below:

"If you were one of the owners of the company how would you deal with the additional 8% tax that you now have to add in? Oh, and let's also remember that much of your business that has confirmed after July 2010 has bought a package that did not include the additional 8% tax that it was exempt from before. (Remember we are a service industry: tourism.)"

The following are the questions put to the Premier:

"(1) Would you pass this increase on to the client? Remember that most countries are going through an economic recession and are therefore very price-sensitive. In fact most of our clients are not looking for a price increase, but rather a price decrease. What would you do? How do you discount now when you are faced with another 8% you didn't plan on? How do you remain competitive?

"(2) Would you absorb the 8%? Seems like an easy thing to do, but wait; we have just gone through a year of low margins and little to no profit. Is this a popular decision with the shareholders of the company? Also, don't forget that you have to pay both federal and provincial corporate tax on your profits. Can you meet cash flow demands and still absorb an additional 8%? Guess we go through another year where we can't spend dollars on technology upgrades, develop new products etc.

Question three for the Premier: "Do you decide that we can't pass it on to the client in an economy that is already bleeding, and to ask the shareholders to go through another year with little at the end of the year would be damaging as well. How long can you keep their attention when the bottom line is slowly but surely disappearing? Do you decide to do what we will do and lay off staff and cut back spending, so that we can be competitive and profitable at the end of the day? Sounds like the right plan to me, but I worry about customer service. I don't want to see that drop off, or we may lose clients next year. Sure is a tough decision!

"You see, Mr. Premier, these are grown-up decisions that we must make every day in our sector. If we overspend, we have to find cost savings somewhere, unlike the government. If it overspends as a result of incompetence or poor planning, it simply adds a tax. Don't forget, though, that your clients are the taxpayers. Eventually, if you keep passing off increases and operating costs to them, they will decide to shop somewhere else for bargains and you and many of your colleagues will be out of work.

"Mr. Premier, I invite you or your finance minister to come to our Toronto office and live a day in the real world of business—you know, the world where you take risks every day, the world where you actually have to be innovative and creative enough to produce something that people will want to buy. But remember, if you are too expensive or the quality of your service is not up to the standard that is expected by your client, you may have to reduce costs, let staff go or possibly even close your doors. It really isn't a complicated formula: We are accountable to ourselves, our clients, our staff and our shareholders. If we work hard, try to anticipate sales and costs of sales, and put a good plan in place, we might have a good year.

"I know you realize that business creates jobs and creates wealth, which in turn through taxes creates revenue to run government, educate our kids, pay for hospitals etc. The rest of the world is trying to dig itself out of a major recession; businesses fail daily. All we ask is that government (your government) get out of the way and quit making it difficult for us to be successful. You know full well that we can't all be public sector employees; someone has to produce in order to feed that sector. Start listening to the people that feed the province and the country!"

It is businesses like this that want to be heard around this province, and that is why the PC Party and leader Tim Hudak are asking for public consultations around this province. That's why we're trying to slow down passage of this legislation that the government is trying to ram through and time-allocate so they don't have to listen to the people. That's why I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Miller has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1553 to 1623.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 15; the nays are 41.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: We tried on that one; it was close.

I'd like to share my remaining time with the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to join debate today. As you know, under the leadership of Tim Hudak and the stewardship of our good friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka, our finance critic, the Progressive Conservative caucus, has opposed this piece of legislation. Not only have we opposed this piece of legislation, but we also believe there need to be public hearings on this HST $3-billion tax grab.

Until the Liberals call public consultation into this piece of legislation, I'm going to have to call for adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1625 to 1655.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the debate.

Will all those in favour please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 14; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for—yes, a point of order, the member from Hamilton East.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, Mr. Wilson brought forward Bill 225 for first reading. Normally, all parties vote for first reading in the House. However, I'm a steelworker, and like everyone else knows—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me.

Mr. Paul Miller: —I would never support a bill that would force workers back to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me.

Mr. Paul Miller: I stood in error in favour of the bill; I intended to vote against first reading. I would like to correct the record. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to speak once again to the HST legislation, as we did yesterday with our opposition motion calling for further public debate into the HST legislation and this 8% tax grab.

There are six concerns that we have on the legislation.

Obviously, under the HST, Ontario will relinquish some of its powers, Constitution-granted taxation powers, to the whims of future federal governments.

We're also concerned that under the HST it is likely that tax-included pricing, or hidden taxation, will come to Ontario because of an obscure law that Jean Chrétien brought in in 1997.

There's also no evidence that harmonized sales taxes work at either the provincial or national level anywhere else in the world, despite what the minister tells us.

We also are concerned that there will be hidden costs for Ontario businesses due to compliance; whether that's their accounting fees or their legal fees or any other

advice that they may need, there will be hidden costs for Ontario businesses.

We also feel they will not in some cases be able to reduce their base prices after the implementation of the HST despite the fact that the government continually tells Ontarians they are going to see lower prices. We don't believe that at all, because it is going to be an 8% tax grab, a $3-billion tax grab, on the middle class and the seniors in this province.

And finally, the most important and I think significant point that the government continually forgets to tell Ontarians when they're talking about the HST is that it will be impossible to repeal. They have locked us in for five years. The next government is going to have to deal with this legislation, and that, to me, is not fair. Not only is that not fair; there are massive penalties. Ontarians will be forced to pay $4.3 billion back from the bribes that they are going to give out after they force this legislation through the Ontario Legislature. And I'm going to tell you, Madam Chair, Ontarians don't want that. They don't want to cede their constitutional powers; they don't want to cede their ability to have direct taxes. And because they will not call public debate, I have no other option in the Ontario Legislature today than to call for adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1700 to 1730.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 12; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity, and I wish they would hold public hearings and a public inquiry—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A number of members have spoken, so I don't know to whom to address it; it could be the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I've got a question for you; I know the member from Leeds gets upset when I ask these questions. I know that, and I apologize to him. But I have this question. The Harper federal government has reduced the GST by not 1% but 2%—you know that—and I think they're proud of it. My sense is they like value-added taxes.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's called keeping a promise.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But that's my sense; I could be wrong.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You've been wrong before.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't know about that.

If the Tories federally cut the GST by 2%, you would think they would want the provincial government not to do anything that goes in the direction they don't want anybody else to go. Yet, member from Parry Sound, they've given the Liberals $4.3 billion to do this.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Shame on them.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what I want you to say, Bill: "Shame on them." Say that.

They've given the Liberals $4.3 billion to harmonize and add an additional tax on 70% of goods and services.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're not the government; we're the provincial Tories.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what I want you to say. Don't get upset. I want you to stand up proudly to denounce the federal Tories. Denounce them. Denounce Jim Flaherty and say he's absolutely wrong. That's what I want you to say.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Please, answer that for me.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I would like to make reference to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's leadoff, although it took us a long time to get there—I actually had 90 minutes to contemplate it on a one-hour speech.

I want to make a point, though. For at least part of his time he spoke about the implications for corporate business. I want to draw attention to an article, from the November 19 National Post that I identified yesterday during my time, about a Mr. Lorne Janes from Newfoundland, who is the owner of Continental Marble of Canada Ltd., and his comments about when a harmonized tax was put in place in Newfoundland. I'll quote from the article:

"The harmonized tax also meant Mr. Janes no longer had to pay taxes on inputs ranging from machinery that cut pieces of marble and granite to buffing cloths that gave finished countertops a nice shine.

"The money saved helped Mr. Janes lower the price on his products to help him compete with low-cost Asian imports."

"'It is one less irritant that I don't have to deal with,'" Mr. Janes says. "'Instead I can focus more on being competitive and maintaining jobs.'"

So from the standpoint of those who are in the real world, that's exactly what's happening.

I have only about 35 seconds. I'm hoping, in the range of debate we have on this matter over time, that I will have the opportunity to introduce a little more formally the comments of the Leader of the Opposition in our December 4, 2008, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs pre-budget consultations, in which he asked one more question of Dr. Jack Mintz. Dr. Mintz was the expert witness that the official opposition chose to have attend those pre-budget hearings. I look forward

to the opportunity of putting on the record the question by Mr. Hudak and Dr. Mintz's response.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's rather sad to see the Liberal backbenchers defending this. I don't know how they're doing it in their ridings, because certainly they're not listening to the people who put them in this place a few years ago.

If you look at Dalton McGuinty's record in 2003, when he said, "No tax hikes," and brought in the biggest single tax increase in the history of this province; if you look at 2007, when he said, "I'm not going to cut your taxes, but I won't increase your taxes"—and now he's bringing in the biggest single sales tax increase in the history of this province.

You know, we're seeing the polls change dramatically for the first time since 2003. That's because people are starting to understand what this Liberal government is all about. We have a Premier who, six years ago, was a different person. He is now living in a tax-subsidized mansion in Toronto. He has gotten away from the people who really matter in this province.

I was in a Santa Claus parade on Saturday. I had an elderly lady come up to me and say, "Mr. Runciman, I'm living on $14,000 a year. How am I going to survive with this new tax?" We're talking about seniors. We're talking about people on fixed incomes. We're talking about the working poor. That's who you're hurting. That's who you're out of touch with, and that's who you're refusing to talk to by eliminating the whole possibility of public hearings across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Dave Levac: The hyperbole that starts to flow on an ongoing basis inside of the House is just that: It's inside of the House. The unfortunate circumstance that we find ourselves in is the accusation of another member claiming they know what's going on in the ridings of the members who are representing the government. Unfortunately, what's happening, what the members opposite are continuing to say, is quite demeaning to the place itself, because what it does say is that they're making an accusation that the members are not representing their ridings—far from the reality of what's really happening.

It's unfortunate that we hear what's happening on an ongoing basis, and the bluster, the chest-beating, the gnashing of teeth and the ripping of garments are not being responded to.

The hundreds of e-mails I have received have received a personal response, and every time a person asks for a meeting, if I can get it in within the time period that I am allowed, I give them the meetings that they want. What's rather interesting about it, which is a big side of the denial from the members of the other side, is that when you do spend some time with them to explain the entire budget, not the half budget that is the easy fix, the easy tax grab mentality, but once we do spend some time, what happens is that they come back and say, "Well, we never heard that. Oh, you mean to tell me that that's what it really translates to?" What they eventually start to say is, "I'm beginning to understand what it is that you are trying to accomplish." For us to land on the ground running when the economy starts to move up, the new reality tells them, "Yes, I understand what has to happen in the province of Ontario for us to make progress." It's really unfortunate that they try to play inside politics, the inside baseball game. I look forward to the day when the people will—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Nepean–Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Some 78% of Ontarians are saying right now that you have it wrong and you're not standing up for them in your own riding, and that's the fact. You can bluster all you like and talk about the half-truths, but the reality is that Ontarians on all sides of the political equation oppose this blatant $3-billion tax grab, and they want us to stand up for them and they want us to speak for them.

1740

I'm going to remind our colleagues opposite of a quote from a retired police officer who was in the gallery a couple of weeks ago with the public sector retirees' union. He said, "In the policing field, we call this legalized theft." That's what the public in Ontario are talking about when they talk about your $3-billion tax grab: legalized theft.

I want to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina, the member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Pickering–Scarborough East and the member for Brant. But the reality is that until we put this piece of legislation out to the public to adequately talk about the impacts of the legislation, everything the members opposite in the government benches, particularly in the government backbenches, are talking about is just a number of speaking points that don't mean much. The people deserve to have their voice heard on this legislation. We're going to stand here and we're going to continue to call for public discussion and public debate and public hearings, because that's what the people want. They want to tell the government that when they're on a fixed income, they can't afford 8% more on their home heating, nor can they afford 8% more on their gas, nor can they afford 8% more on their veterinary fees. They can't afford you.

You have disintegrated this wonderful province, the economy that we once had, 100,000 times over. You have just really taken us to a new level of lows, and that is a shame. You have taken this province from first to worst in economic growth, and the only time you'll be happy is when you pick every—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, I would like unanimous consent to stand down the lead by my friend from Beaches–East York.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you very much. You're all so kind.

Interjection: Anything for the NDP.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But I'm just going to attack the federal Conservatives, if that's okay with you.

First of all, I want to say hello to Greg, who is a regular watcher of this program. Greg, hello. And, Greg, say hello to Nicole as well, your daughter. She used to be a page around here, and she was a happy page, happy to be here. She learned a lot. And she might vote for us in the end; you never know. You've got to do your best.

Welcome to this political forum. It's 20 to 6, and I've got a full 20 minutes. I was worried about not getting my full time, because I have been itching to get at this bill for quite some time. I am so opposed to this bill. You just don't know how strongly I oppose it, and I'm going to do my best to express myself as much as I can. I'm going to attack the Premier; I'm going to attack all the Liberals on this. I'm going to attack everybody, pretty well. And I'm going to start with Harper.

As you know, Harper cut the GST by 2%. And I thought, "If the Tories oppose the GST and they cut it by 2%, they're not going to collaborate with any provincial government that wants to increase GST, PST—or at least, in this case, the PST—on items where you have a GST." I said to myself, "He's not going to do that." And lo and behold, Jim Flaherty, the finance minister, meets with McGuinty, or at least the finance minister of Ontario, and they concoct a deal together in the backrooms. They get together, they talk about it, they strike a deal, a memorandum, and the federal Conservative Party gives them $4.3 billion. That's a whole heap of money to give away. Why would you give that kind of money away if you're opposed to these kinds of taxes: the GST federally, the PST provincially?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: What's the answer, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to get to that.

So the question is, why would they do it?

Interjection: Why?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because politically it's smart to cut the GST and politically it's smart to allow the Liberals provincially to increase the PST. This way, the provincial government finds a way to raise money that they desperately need, therefore not having to go cap in hand to the federal Tories and say, "Please, we need some money. We need more money." The Conservatives don't want to say, "No, we can't help you anymore"—although they will—"because, we've got our own deficit to deal with." But they have allowed the provincial government to go ahead and use a tool that they normally support, that they won't get any flak for—but that the Liberals will raise the money they need to be able to provide for all the provincial programs, and it's done. All it costs them is $4.3 billion. It's not a bad deal, but it's a lot of money.

The provincial Liberal government, of course, is going to take that money and dole it out to people and make them feel happy for the next year. It's almost like a nice Christmas present, really. Some people are going to get up to $1,000. Individuals will get $300. It's one-time—the $1,000 is three times over the course of a year starting this coming June, but it will be one-time money and it's gone; $4.3 billion gone.

How do you find money like that? Where do you get money like that? The government has a huge deficit at the federal level—$55 billion or so, and it's going to increase, by the way—yet they've been able to find $4.3 billion to give away to the Liberal government to be able to increase the PST on 70% of the goods and services. I don't get it. I just don't get it.

Then you've got McGuinty saying in opposition, or at least even a couple of years ago, "We're not going to do this." He even said, "We're not going to decrease corporate taxes." He said that. He said, "It's okay for Tories to do that, but not for Liberals." And then he announces that he not only is going to introduce the harmonized tax but he's going to reduce corporate taxes as well.

Mr. Jeff Leal: And personal taxes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And personal income taxes, yes.

A number of Liberal friends are asking me: Why? Why would they do that? And I say to myself—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: So it's all about tax reduction? Is that what it is?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say to the Minister of Consumer Services, who is my friend Ted, there is always a reason, and the reasons don't hold up. They do not hold up. They are cutting corporate taxes to the tune of about $6 billion when you include small business in there as well. But the bigger corporations are getting $4 billion in tax giveaways—something McGuinty was never going to do because he's a good Liberal. Not him. Neither Chrétien nor Martin—he wasn't going to give it away, but in 1993 they decided, "Things changed." McGuinty says, "Things are different." Things change. All of a sudden, a modern world hits them. The old world is just too old and you need to come into the new world.

For the last 15 years, we have been giving away money to the corporations. For the last 15 years—federally and provincially, under Tories and Liberals. It doesn't matter which one it is, whether they are provincial or federal; it doesn't matter. We've been giving away tax money to the corporations for the last 15 years, all under the name of, "We've got to do it to create jobs."

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Boys, lower your voices. Boys. Madam Speaker, tell them to lower their voices.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Keep the conversations down or take them outside.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't think they heard you, actually.

So for 15 years, they've been cutting corporate taxes. And if that is the case, you would think we would have loads of jobs in this country, that we wouldn't have anything to worry about. And every year and in every election, Liberals and Tories keep cutting corporate taxes a little more, and this time McGuinty says, "We're in the

new order, the new world. We've got to cut some more corporate taxes because we need to create jobs." He actually believes it. McGuinty actually believes it. It hasn't worked for 15 years. We're going to give $4 billion more—accumulated, it's $5 billion or $6 billion—and he actually believes it's going to create more jobs. It hasn't worked for the last 15 years, but when McGuinty does it, it's going to work.

What oracle is he consulting? Do you understand? The Greeks used to consult oracles 2,000 years ago, and these days McGuinty is consulting new fairies, because there are a whole lot of fairies. They come under different names. This fairy comes under the name of Mintz. He wrote a report where he says, "With this harmonized tax, the combined effect of harmonizing PST and GST, we're going to create 600,000 jobs."

1750

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And Mike Brown believes it, like the fairy that he's consulted. They all believe it: the rump folks, the ministers, McGuinty. They've all consulted Mintz, and Mintz has given his stamp of approval. Yes, it's 600,000 jobs—

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's 590,000.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —give or take a couple. I remember Mulroney saying that with the free trade agreement—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We have conversations going on that need to be taken elsewhere if they're not going to be quieter.

You may continue.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I remember Mulroney when he introduced the free trade agreement. I used to love his mellifluous voice—he had a nice deep voice. He would often say of the North American free trade agreement that, "If we introduce it, the country will be prosperous." I wish I could do it the way he did it, because he actually meant it, and you could feel it in his voice when he said it: "We're going to be a country of prosperity and"—he used another word; I forget it. It's 17 years ago or 20 years ago. But you actually believed the guy. Even if you were a New Democrat, you'd say, "Maybe I believe him," because of his mellifluous voice—with honey in it, right?

Interjection: He was great, wasn't he?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, I thought he was. Of course, none of the jobs came to be.

Mr. Jeff Leal: He was on CFRB one day and said that thousands of jobs had been coming in—on Peter Shurman's show.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes. Exactly. Like the member from Peterborough says—he's over here.

Interjection: Is that where he sits now?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, it doesn't matter.

The McGuinty government says, "We're going to create 600,000 jobs," and all the rump over here and all the other guys and women over there—they're all guys today—they actually believe it. But it's not possible. Any magician can put numbers together, and this—

Interjection: What's the solution?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not a solution. The issue is, Dr. Mintz—he probably has a doctorate—writes in a report, "600,000 jobs," and they believe it. And if they don't believe it, they have to pretend to believe it.

You used to have oracles 2,000 years ago. It was just a plain little trick—a mask in the hole and people would consult, and sometimes there would be a voice on the other side telling them things. They actually believed it. And 2,000 years later, you've got Liberals believing in the same fairies. It's like Casper exists. They're all looking for Casper, and they seem to find him everywhere, in every corner of Queen's Park. I don't believe it. I don't know how any sane, reasonable-minded, intelligent-minded Liberal could believe that. I don't know how any reasonable-minded constituent, citizen—yes, taxpayer—believes that. If they said it was 6,000 jobs, you'd say, "Okay, maybe it's true—6,000. It's probably possible." But 600,000? Almost a million jobs as a result of doing this? How is that possible? It isn't possible. It is manufactured. It is mendacious—but the Clerk knows what that word means. You have to be careful. Some clerks don't know all the vocabulary that's in the dictionary. It's manufactured. It's invented. It's not real. A whole lot of people are going to get whacked, and it's the middle class that's going to get whacked.

This is a flat tax, and normally, left-leaning Liberals—although I have been desperately seeking them out of late in the last year or two. Often I would say, "Could any left-leaning Liberals stand up?" No one stands up. They're not here. Normally, left-leaning Liberals oppose flat taxes. They do. Tories love them, all Tories, although provincially, this time they don't like them. That's fine. Today, they don't like them, but that's fine. I understand. If they get into power, I think they're going to love them. I suspect they're going to love them, because it will be a change of heart. But today, in opposition, they don't like them. I understand.

But this harmonized tax, the combination of PST and GST into one, which now includes 70% of new goods and services, i.e., gasoline, home heating, vitamins, funeral services, veterinary services—the list is long. You're going to tack on another 8% on those services that the middle class is going to have to support on their heavy shoulders.

It is a flat tax. Why is it a flat tax? Because it means someone earning $30,000 and someone earning $200,000 are going to pay the same 8%. There's no progressiveness attached to it. You understand what I mean, "progressive." It is an equal tax that everybody pays, and I argue that if I make $110,000 or $120,000 and someone makes $30,000, I should be paying a little more tax than the person making $30,000.

You've got the Premier standing up saying, "We are reducing progressive income taxes"—proudly he says this—"to 93% of the population."

Interjection: Good news.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Income taxes are progressive because they are based on ability to pay. McGuinty and the Liberals—the former reeve and mayor here is telling me that he's proud to have cut progressive taxes and equally proud to have introduced a non-progressive flat tax that he calls progressive. I don't get it. I don't get it.

Now, I believe the McGuinty who was a lawyer is a reasonable-minded person. I really do believe that, because you'd think if he's a lawyer, he's got to have some intelligence. You'd think that, right? I don't know whether he actually believes it or doesn't believe it, knows or doesn't know, whether he pretends to know. I don't really know what he knows. But any reasonable-minded person, including the Premier, would know that this is a flat tax and it's not progressive at all.

Liberals provincially and Liberals federally—Tories federally and Liberals provincially—they all love to eliminate progressive income taxes. They all love it. Not only that, but Liberals provincially and Tories federally love to cut corporate taxes. When you do that, who's going to pay the bills? It's not provincial MPPs who earn a good salary. It's a middle class who live from day to day in precarious positions where they don't know from day to day whether they are going to have a full-time job. They won't know. Most of them are living—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mr. Reeve, former reeve, most of them are living on part-time wages. Most of the new jobs are part-time; they're not full-time. The middle-class jobs, once unionized manufacturing jobs, have disappeared. We have virtually lost, in the last three to four years, close to 370,000 jobs in this province alone in manufacturing—good-paying jobs, unionized. They're gone. McGuinty says they're gone. You've got a middle class that's disappearing, and you are left with precarious work, and very part-time.

Pensions are disappearing—federal level, provincial level. Corporations and governments are saying, "You know, it's really tough to hold on to these defined packages, defined-contribution plans, really tough. You've got to give up something." All the workers, whether they're unionized or not, are being asked to take less because of the mistakes that financial systems have made in the US, in Europe and here in Canada.

In the US, the parasitical financial organizations caused the disasters, and then McGuinty, and Harper at the federal level, give away billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts to the very institutions that have caused the collapse of our economic system. And then they say to unionized workers and non-unionized workers, "Sorry; we can't afford your pensions any more. Sorry; the private sector workers have taken a hit, and now you've got to take a hit." We keep giving money away to big corporations who don't need it, and then we clobber them with a harmonized tax and we say, "That's okay. You've got to get on board. This is the best way to create 600,000 jobs." Nobody believes it, not if you have a brain. If you have a brain, you don't believe it unless you're a Liberal.

Interjections.

1800

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Sorry. I didn't mean to offend.

We need hearings. McGuinty and all you Liberals, you fine Liberals, even the left-leaning ones, are so proud of this. You were so proud to be in the modern age, to bring reforms to the modern world. If you're so proud, strongly defend it through public hearings. Go out and tell them how much you love this plan, that you think it's good. Go out and attack Jim Flaherty and tell him he's wrong for doing this. We've got to attack them. The federal Conservatives are bad; you know that. You've got to attack them.

Be proud. Don't be shy. Don't hold back. Don't just have a day or two and end the discussion. If you believe in it, you're proud. Hold your chests up really high—right?—and take it out and do the debates. That's what I think is needed. We need to hear from the citizens and taxpayers of Ontario so that we can hear what they have to say, so that you can hear what they have to say. And if they agree with you, fine; if the majority agrees with you, that's fine. That's the way it works. And if they don't, then you will have listened to them. That's the least you could do.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. Begin.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This morning I asked the Minister of Health a very specific question regarding some very serious concerns brought up during committee hearings on eHealth, and this morning the minister completely denied the people of Ontario an answer. When asked why Rita Burak sought legal advice about whether evidence of what she calls "inappropriate practices" should be turned over to the OPP, the minister refused to answer.

For weeks, the Premier and the minister have been saying that the auditor saw no evidence of fraud or criminal activity in eHealth, but Ms. Burak found something that she was so convinced was evidence that she got a legal opinion. We asked for the report received regarding these practices during public accounts, but as of today we have yet to see it.

The minister, instead of answering my question this morning, went on to discuss the forward-moving focus

that the government has now taken with respect to eHealth. But I must ask, how does one move forward with good direction without first reviewing and analyzing the missteps of the past? The answer is, you don't.

John C. Maxwell, an author who has made the New York Times bestseller list and regularly speaks with Fortune 500 companies and international government leaders about success in leadership, has something to say about moving forward after making a mistake. In fact, he's written a book on it, Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success. According to this book, the McGuinty government has completed four out of the five steps to failure following a mistake.

I'd like to take a moment to review those steps with my colleagues still here in the House.

(1) They're angry, taking frustration out on others. With less than a year since the eHealth scandal was made public, the McGuinty government has been able to secure the departures, resignations and termination of many high-ranking officials, all whom have taken the fall for what was said to be direct orders from certain government members.

(2) They cover up mistakes. I don't think this stage requires any further explanation.

(3) They speed up, try to leave troubles behind by working harder and faster, but without changing direction. I believe the very issue we're discussing here today is a perfect example of this. In response to my question, the minister said, "We're moving forward, as quickly as we can, in a responsible way to bring Ontario to the e-health world that we need to embrace." This, instead of answering my question regarding a very important issue that was addressed both in the auditor's report and in public accounts. I'm sorry, but there's no moving forward without addressing the missteps of the past, and at least that, I would say, would be the response of a responsible government in the first place.

(4) They back up, obfuscating at first and then backing up to cover up.

Finally, this model dictates that step number 5 is that they give up. We have not seen this government engage in step 5 yet. However, they're doing a fantastic job at the other four.

I'd like to take just a few moments to remind this House of a statement made by Premier McGuinty in the House during his days of opposition:

"In fact, a public inquiry process keeps the politics out. When there is a public inquiry, politicians can't fiddle with its work. They can't edit out embarrassing mistakes or manipulate witness lists, for example. Most importantly, they discount or dismiss the findings of a public inquiry at their peril.

"Public inquiries give us facts on what happened in the past, and they give us valuable recommendations for the future. They give the public the answers that they desire and to which I believe they are entitled."

These words—never more true. A public inquiry—never more needed. Reading through that quote only does one thing to me: It shows me that Mr. McGuinty is nothing but an empty shell of what he used to be. He used to believe in transparency and accountability, and now all he cares about is preventing information from coming out before the public. The Liberals have shut down public accounts, denied the public an inquiry, and now they're refusing to answer our questions in the House. Madam Speaker, I know you feel the same way. We take our jobs in this House very seriously. My job is to hold this government to account, asking the questions that the people of Ontario want us to ask. And by not answering my questions, the Minister of Health is not only not doing her job, but she's also preventing me from doing mine. That is why I was unsatisfied with what went on this morning during question period. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Huron–Bruce has five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I certainly am very pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I want to speak first with regard to the question on the legal opinion. Following the release of the Auditor General's special report on Ontario's electronic health records initiative dated October 7, 2009, eHealth Ontario's board of directors sought independent legal advice regarding the awarding of the $737,000 contract as described on page 12 of the auditor's report. The board felt this extra degree of due diligence was important from a governance perspective, and the legal opinion clearly states, "In our opinion, the facts set out in the Auditor General's report do not provide evidence of a criminal offence."

I wanted to speak to that specifically and then I wanted to talk about moving forward, because we certainly understand how important e-health is to the people of Ontario and how it's such an important part of moving our health care system forward. Ontarians also expect that their tax dollars be properly invested, and so do we. We want to ensure that every single dime we invest in the health care system goes toward improving patient care. We've taken these concerns very seriously and we've taken swift action to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are used prudently. That is why we asked the Auditor General to report on his own review as quickly as possible. That's also why we have implemented new procurement rules across the board in the Ontario government. We've curtailed unnecessary expense claims with additional mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

Our investments in electronic health records are significant and they're helping us make real progress in our health care. They will ultimately result in better patient care, more efficient health care services and delivery for all of Ontario.

It's important that we keep moving forward on our e-health agenda. We're not alone in this desire. I want to quote from the president of the Ontario Medical Association: "This is a grand task and one that requires a long-term commitment. The expectations are both promising and exciting, and it is imperative the government and physicians get on with the job of getting every patient in Ontario an electronic medical record." We're committed

to this goal and to ensuring that the money that we spend on eHealth is devoted to initiatives that will strengthen and modernize the province's health care system.

1810

We have had accomplishments, and I want to speak to those. Since 2008, 80,000 Ontarians are in a pilot project for ePrescribing, and that will help save lives. Since 2005, more than four million Ontarians are already participating in the electronic medical records program run in partnership by the province and the Ontario Medical Association. More than one million children have electronic health records as well.

All Ontario hospitals have gone filmless and are now using digital diagnostic scans, which will ultimately allow for scans to be shared all across the province. The drug profile viewer provides authorized health care providers in Ontario's 245 public hospitals with drug claim histories for 2.3 million recipients of the Ontario drug benefit, and it operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The integrated public health information system is used by all of our 36 public health units for reportable infectious disease surveillance and management, and we certainly have heard a lot about this system in the press recently because it was used extensively to respond to the H1N1 pandemic.

The Ontario Telemedicine Network helps patients in remote areas get medical consultations via video conferencing, with over 70,000 teleconferencing events taking place annually.

And there's more. The Ontario lab information system provides electronic access to patients' lab results, regardless of where they are performed in Ontario. This system contains over 50% of Ontario's lab test results.

Unfortunately, Speaker, I have run out of time, but I do thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond today.

TAXATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Cambridge has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question today arose out of a fundraiser, and that fundraiser was, I understand, held by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. The fundraiser advertised that the Minister of Revenue—who is the mouthpiece, if I may use that word, to sell the GST to the public—would be there, and the charge for coming to the event was $50.

One of my duties is being the critic for seniors. When we're dealing with seniors, we're also dealing with people with fixed incomes, working families who work for minimum wage or close thereto. We've got to understand that the harmonized tax is the most regressive tax a modern society can impose upon its citizens. It became very popular in Europe because in Europe many countries had great difficulties collecting income taxes. They're somewhat more corrupt than we are, and an easy way of collecting taxes is, of course, a tax on goods and services. It can be traced more easily and enforced. It has become popular in Europe, and we have adopted it.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned, it's terribly regressive. What does that mean? Our income tax started some decades ago because of the First World War. It was to pay for the First World War. Unfortunately, when the war was over, the tax continued, and that was a progressive income tax. Those who had a larger income paid more. Not only do they pay more because they make more, they pay on a higher marginal rate, which is really fair. It ends up with a distribution of income. This government really no longer believes in the income tax and the redistribution of funds so that the wealthy, who can afford it, share some of their wealth with those—the working poor, the seniors and people on fixed incomes. This government is going to take the tack of adopting a very regressive tax on most services that we do not pay tax on at present.

One of my first questions to the Premier was that if these consultations with the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex are to take place, would they offer seniors' discounts? We have a tradition of offering seniors' discounts; why not for the opportunity to meet the minister in charge of imposing this tax? There are so many people who want to speak. They want to speak to the Premier; they want to speak to the ministers of this government and they want to voice their concern and outrage with this tax. They recall that in 2003, this Premier signed a written pledge not to increase taxes in Ontario, and one of the first things he did when he got into office after 2003 was to increase taxes by a massive health tax. Similarly, in the 2007 election his famous quotation was, "I will not lower taxes, but I will not raise them either." Again, here we are with the biggest tax grab, next to the health tax, that this province has seen: a $3-billion tax grab that they claim is not happening, and I did not receive an adequate answer—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane has up to five minutes.

Mr. David Ramsay: Where do I start? I think I should start with defending the honour of my colleague the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, because she was basically attacked for doing what we all do in this democratic system, and that is that we have to raise funds to keep the democratic system going because we face, every four years, elections, and elections, whether we like that or not, take money. All of us have fundraisers, of course, every year, and maybe more often, depending who you are, but we all have to do that. The first thing we do is thank all those people who attend and thank them for supporting the democratic process that we have in this country. We're very fortunate to have such a process in this country.

It's interesting to note, because most of us would have a guest speaker, that the member charged $50 for her fundraiser. I think most of us in the House would say that

that is quite a modest price. In fact, last night the opposition House leader held a fundraiser here in Toronto for $250. He used a registered lobbyist for religious schools, and that's fine if he wants to do that. But it's a little bit of a difference.

We have had 160 town hall meetings with the public organizations right across the province, from rotary clubs to seniors' teas and ratepayers' associations, and the list goes on. I do notice that when the leader of the official opposition has a town hall meeting—he has a series of regional town hall meetings. Here's an application, I see, for November 21 in the southwest region, and this is a town hall meeting. But he charges $25 for the town hall meeting. So if you want to come and talk to him, it costs $25. That's not a fundraiser. I find that kind of ironic.

I would say to the members that part of the genius of this parliamentary system that we have is that from time to time we can certainly agree to disagree. I have to say to you that I would have more respect for your position on this, because it's certainly your right to disagree with this, if you were to stand up and say that if you were to ever obtain power in the province, you would then be consistent with what you're saying today and you would then eliminate this particular initiative. But you don't say that, and that tells me that you really are supportive of this and you're just playing political games.

I think, in your heart, and I know, deep down in your soul, you know how courageous our Premier is in doing the right thing. As politically risky as it is, because we know there's lots of opposition to it, Premier McGuinty knows that this is the right thing to do for our families in order to build an economy. We've got so many people out of work today. When we reset this economy, it's not going to be like it was before. We can't go back to the old Ontario, as much as we loved that and prospered in it. It takes bold leadership to make those dramatic and bold changes to make that revolution happen, to make sure that Ontario again will be the number one jurisdiction in this country. That is going to happen with this. It will take time, but it takes courage to do it, and I fully support our Premier in making that happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1821.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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No. 192

Nº 192

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

DEC 0 3 2009
University of Toronto

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Wednesday 25 November 2009

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 25 novembre 2009

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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 25 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 25 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO LABOUR MOBILITY ACT, 2009

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2009 SUR LA MOBILITÉ DE LA MAIN-D'OEUVRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate? The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to have the opportunity to stand in this place and bring some reflection on legislation that is before us. In my last 10 or 14 years here, I've seen these labour mobility bills brought forward in various forms, one or another. I remember the one brought forward when Jim Flaherty was the Minister of Labour. The bill was called the Fairness is a Two-Way Street Act. It was primarily dealing with the province of Quebec and their inability to have a reasoned relationship.

We often see in the economy itself, where there are different labour standards between the provinces—

Mr. Dave Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I normally try not to interrupt speeches, and I apologize, but I'd just ask a question about rotation and time left on a speech. If I'm not mistaken, there was some time left by a previous speaker, which would have then moved to a rotation?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member from Brant for his point of order. It is a mea culpa on my part. I should have asked the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who had four minutes left, if he was going to continue his debate. If he chose not to, I then would have moved on to the NDP, to recognize them in the rotation, and then it would have come around.

So I'm going to start all over again. We're dealing with Bill 175. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would love to relinquish time to speak in this Legislature, but I can tell you that I would likely be getting letters.

Hon. Jim Watson: Letters to thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, there could be letters of thanks; there's no question about that. But there would also be letters asking me why I did not choose to use the entire time allotted to me to speak to this piece of legislation.

We're talking about Bill 175, which is the labour mobility bill. A mea culpa on my part too: Because it was actually last week when we last spoke on this bill, I quite frankly wasn't aware that I still had some time left on this bill.

Mr. Dave Levac: Don't criticize your whip.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I never would; I'm criticizing myself. I wasn't aware that I had time left on this bill.

It is an opportunity for me again to highlight that the general principle of this bill, which is to allow people to carry their credentials from one jurisdiction to another, is something we generally support. I've listened to Minister Milloy give his dissertation on the reasoning behind the bill. As my friend Mr. O'Toole from Durham began to say—and I'm quite sure he will repeat when his time in the rotation comes up—this is another attempt at trying to put some symmetry into the expectations from one jurisdiction to another.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation is asking me if he has read the bill. I would certainly say to the minister that I don't know if he's had time to read the bill, but maybe he's got some time to write a bill that might get those driver's licence people back to work here in the province of Ontario. Every day I'm getting calls and letters in my office wondering why they're not able to get their drivers' licences—students who are worried about a job next summer and require a full licence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sure the member will be able to answer those letters, but he should be debating the bill that's on the floor, Bill 175.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Bill 175 is about the ability to work where you choose by having your credentials

recognized, and the ability to get a job in this province, quite frankly, can be affected by your right to a driver's licence that for every other reason you're qualified to have. You're old enough, you've passed the written test, you've filled the time, with respect to the jurisdictional need, to be able to apply for that full licence, but you can't do it because you can't get a test. This is an issue that is haunting people in my riding. Students have come to my office and said, "I have a job available next summer, but I will not be able to take that job if I don't have my G licence." Quite frankly, if you want to talk about labour mobility, what about our students? What about our kids?

Have I moved adjournment on this, and of the House?

I just had a quick question for the table, Mr. Speaker, and they have answered that question for me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Speaker knew that too.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I bet the Speaker knew that too. Sometimes we forget about these things, because this is a busy place at the best of times.

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I do hope that as the government is working on bringing this bill—as I say, in principle we support Bill 175—they are diligently working as well to ensure that all those people who could qualify for a job will be able to get that job. What are we going to do about the backlog? We're going to have to bring in some special-circumstance people to cover that backlog. What is it now? I think it's 5,000 a day, or something, or 4,000 a day—the backlog; probably half a million are going to be shortly waiting for those kinds of things. Gosh, I just feel for those families that are depending upon that ability to have that driver's licence, and I hope that the government will recognize that and do something about that as they're working on this bill on labour mobility. It is a good idea to recognize the credentials of people from one jurisdiction to another. So we hope that in the fullness of time, they'll be able to deal with both of those issues. I thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to get a chance in a few minutes to express some of my views on this bill. I think that when the member says that labour mobility between various provinces is a good thing, I would agree on the surface. The problem is, you'd better have the same standards, because as you know here in Ontario, we have an apprenticeship training system that has a pretty high standard as compared to other provinces; to say that we're going to allow tradespeople to come in to work in the province utilizing their particular credentials from their province that may have a lesser standard in Ontario I don't think serves the contractor well. I don't think it serves, quite frankly, the issue of the consumer well, either. I'll have a chance to speak to that a little bit later.

I think what we should be trying to do is follow the model of the European Union. It seems that Canada and North America are locked in; whenever we want to talk about how we're able to bring down trade barriers, we seem to always try to rush to the bottom end. I'm not saying for a second that this is what the government is, on the surface, attempting to do, but the effect is the same. What we should be saying is that if we want to lessen trade barriers between provinces, we should have a model similar to the European common union which says, "All right, let's establish what the standard is going to be between the provinces and let's work to that standard." Hopefully, what you end up doing is taking the best of the various provinces and putting it into one standard that people can live with; in the end, if you are going to bring down these trade barriers, it's important that you respect the training that has been established in provinces like Ontario, that has been around for years, and develop the training programs that we have for various tradespeople such as electricians, welders, mechanics, millwrights, tool and die people and others, because Ontario is known as a jurisdiction in Canada with some of the best standards when it comes to training tradespeople. After all, if they can train a guy like me, they can train anybody.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to enter the debate on Bill 175, and I want to focus on one example about why this bill is important to a riding like Huron–Bruce. The example that I want to use is, a doctor who is already certified in Alberta wants to move to Ontario. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario will accept and certify the doctor without requiring him or her to undertake any additional training, experience, examinations or assessments. So what does that mean to a riding like Huron–Bruce? I can tell you that one of the challenges that we have faced in doctor recruitment is ensuring that the certification remains intact when they come into the province. Quite frankly, doctors have found it very difficult for the recertification, and they have struggled to understand why.

So we see a bill like Bill 175 coming forward and starting to eliminate the barriers—that will give the ability for rural communities to have a greater pool of doctors to work from within that are certified, licensed and trained by a university in Canada or internationally. If they were licensed in another province, this gives them the mobility to come in.

We recognize that there has been a significant amount of work by health care professionals in addressing the barriers to allow for greater capacity, and certainly that has been very well received in rural communities such as mine in the riding of Huron–Bruce. But this is the further work and understanding of the ability of labour to move around that strengthens our province. That is, quite frankly, why I will be supporting Bill 175.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would like to compliment the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He brought up a very practical example, that is, the DriveTest issue,

of a standard that we have here. I hope they are compliant with the standards in other jurisdictions and recognize other jurisdictions. If that's the case, why don't drivers in Ontario go to another province and do their AZ licence, or whatever it is, and come in here?

But there are two other real-life examples that have been brought to my attention where our standards are much higher in Ontario than in other jurisdictions. One would be the chartered accountants of Ontario. The CAs have the full right of public audits in Ontario. In other provinces, that is not the case. CAs, CGAs, CMAs and other people with an accounting designation have the right to do the public audit, which complies.

What the members on the other side, on the government side, are saying does not stand. In fact, they're not completely revealing what is happening. Under this, the labour mobility code contains the following exemptions: the rules against imposing material, additional training, experience and examination. An Ontario-regulated authority is not prohibited from imposing on the applicant any requirement that is identified on the website of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. What are you hiding here? This isn't complete mobility inter-jurisdictionally.

A good example, another fine example, would be opticians. For opticians in some provinces, it's one year or less of training. An optician in Ontario has four years of training at the university level. Which standard should apply? I would expect that ours would be a higher standard in Ontario.

Is this really about lowering standards in Ontario? Crowding out Ontario students who are diligent in their studies, apprenticeships or trades? We have standards; it's called the red seal program in the trades.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaking from a trades and crafts perspective, I would say that the solution to this problem would be national regulations and certification for tradespersons. What's happening is that, for years, people have been allowed to go from province to province. The only thing you had to do, for example, if you were a welder in Ontario and wanted to weld in Alberta, was write an inter-provincial ticket to show that you were certified to do it, even though our standards were higher. That was removed a few years ago. You now have the red seal program, so you can go from province to province.

Where the problem is—it's not a problem; actually, it's good—is that local union or non-union places have what they call work under permit. So if you're from out of province, they make sure their guys in their union are working first and then people from other provinces can work under permit through those locals. That's always been in place.

Twenty years ago, I could have worked in Labrador City as a tradesperson. What you have to do is nationalize the trades, you have to make sure an electrician in Nova Scotia is as qualified as an electrician in BC, and then you won't have a problem. If every province has different standards and Ontario's is the highest, and you are opening the floodgates and bringing in less-qualified people into Ontario to work, then I've got a problem with that. I would assume that the people of Ontario would want the best.

Every province, for that matter, would want the best-trained people they can get. As long as they meet the requirements of Ontario under our training programs and our expectations, then it shouldn't be a problem.

But I think they're complicating the issue here; they're opening the floodgates for less-qualified people and people to come in here who—let's face it, in the States there were doctors who went up there who were from—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the members for Timmins–James Bay, Huron–Bruce, Durham, and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their comments. I think the members have raised very, very pertinent and important points with regard to the equality of qualifications nationwide.

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I would hope that the government is ensuring that those are part of the legislative body of this bill, and if not, through regulation, that we are not accepting people of less-qualified training standards to occupy positions in trades here in Ontario, having been qualified somewhere else where the standards are lower. We understand that, and it's a very good point raised by members of the third party.

In no way, shape or form should this or any other piece of legislation lead to a lessening of standards with regard to the quality of work expected by tradespeople in this province. The public has a legitimate expectation of a standard of quality of work that we currently adhere to. There should be nothing we do, as a legislative body, that would water that down or dilute it in any way, because then the public would lose confidence in the very trades they have confidence in today.

Speaking of trades, we could do our trades and the people who are prospective members of those trades a real service by changing the apprenticeship ratios here in the province of Ontario to something less than the absolutely restrictive way they are adhered to today, so that we could actually qualify more young people here in Ontario to participate in those trades.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm glad to get time to weigh in on the debate on Bill 175. I just want to say up front that New Democrats don't oppose the idea of being able to find ways to allow trade to happen between provinces in an easier way, and the mobility of workers east to west. We obviously don't oppose that. I think the question for us as social democrats becomes, how you go about doing that?

I said a little bit earlier, in response to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, that what I see this bill doing is following the trusted old model we've used in North America, whenever it comes to lowering trade

barriers, of rushing to the lowest common denominator. If you look back at our negotiations around free trade and NAFTA, our federal and provincial governments, along with the Americans, and the Mexicans in that case, negotiated free trade agreements that supposedly were for the betterment of the Ontario economy and the Canadian economy. I would argue that that turned out to be a bit of a fiasco—not a bit of a fiasco, but a large one. My point to this debate is that we negotiated those agreements not bringing everybody to a better standard but allowing a move to the lower standard.

For example, with our NAFTA agreements, you have to compete against Mexico. For many of our manufacturers, higher training levels, higher skill levels in their plants, better health and safety conditions etc. have turned out to be a detriment, and those particular plants have moved to Mexico. Why? Because they don't have to follow those standards under NAFTA. You can take your plant and move it from Woodstock, Ontario, to Tijuana, Mexico, and produce the same goods you used to produce here in Ontario and sell them back into the Canadian economy, knowing that workers are not protected when it comes to a collective agreement, knowing there are no health and safety laws, knowing that the environment is not being protected in the way it should be etc.

My point is, why have we in North America become so fixated on trying to negotiate trade agreements that basically rush us to the lowest common denominator? There are other models out there that are more successful. If you look at the European Union, it has been quite successful. It has not been without its problems. As we know, a lot of the citizens of various original signatories to the EU—countries like France and Germany and others—were opposed. They were afraid of what it would mean to their national economies. But what they did in order to alleviate those concerns was to say, "Rather than have people join the EU and have everybody rush to the lowest standard within the European Union, let's make it a condition before you can become a member of the EU that you meet the higher standards."

So countries like France and Germany and others that have very strong environmental standards, very strong labour standards, very strong standards when it comes to training etc., were able to set the condition so that if you are Portugal entering the EU, or Greece or Turkey trying to get into the EU, you have to meet those standards, which are quite better than what you have in your own country. As a result of that, I think everybody has benefited.

Workers in countries like France and Germany have not seen the out-migration to the degree that we have seen here in North America—jobs to a lower-wage economy. Some of that has still happened, but not to the same degree that we see here in North America. More importantly, for the workers of those countries and the communities in those countries that are joining the EU, they have seen an increase in their standards, on the environmental side, on the labour side and on the social responsibility side. I think that is a model that we're able to follow.

My problem with this legislation is, on the one hand, I, as a Canadian—let alone as an Ontario legislator—want to see a Canada where workers, professional tradespeople, and professionals are able to use their certifications and work from one end of this country to the other; I don't oppose that. But if you're saying to me that Ontario is going to become the haven for anybody that wants to come and work here and not have to meet our higher standards—because Ontario does have some of the highest standards—then it becomes a problem. Then why have we invested billions of dollars in training tradespeople, foresters, CGAs—and the list goes on—to a higher standard here in Ontario only to allow people with a lower standard to come in and compete for those jobs here in Ontario? I think this is completely a step in the wrong direction—not as far as the intent of being able to enhance labour mobility. I think that's a good idea. But you have to do it with an eye that we try to have a standard across this country that doesn't rush us to the lowest common denominator.

Now, I look at table 1 in the bill on pages 28, 29 and 30 and take a look at some of the acts that are going to be affected by this legislation, and let's just walk through what that means. I look at one of them as being the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, 1994, which my colleague, Howard Hampton, when he was Minister of Natural Resources, brought forward to this House. It has turned out to be one of the better acts that have been passed in a number of years when it comes to how we approach forestry from a stewardship perspective here in Ontario.

Ontario is second to none. If you look at our practices, how we approach harvesting and silviculture in this province, we are heads above others. All you need to do is look at the northern Ontario forests and compare them to forests across this country, and you will see that Ontario is really light years ahead when it comes to how we do forest management.

Just to put it simply for those people who don't know, there used to be a time in this province when forest companies and others who were just trying to cut the trees and sell them to the companies didn't have to have regard for the damage they were causing in the forest and the sustainability of that harvesting practice. Along came the Ontario NDP government, and under my colleague Mr. Hampton, we put in place the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, which set in place a very, very strict system about how we approach the issue of harvesting our crown forests. A forest company that has a sustainable forestry licence has to follow a forest management plan. That forest management plan, simply put, says that if the natural cycle of the forest, by argument, is 90 years, you will have your forest divided up in such a way that when you start cutting in spot A and you finish cutting in spot Z you're going to be in a 90-year cycle, so that you're able to come back to that first block that you cut 90 years ago, but that you have reforested that block that you cut 90 years ago.

That's done in a number of ways. In some cases, it's a question of replanting. Where that's applicable and where

that makes some sense, we replant. In other places, we do careful logging, where you go in and cut the more mature trees and you leave the smaller, younger trees there to continue growing. In some other cases, you do aerial seeding. But the point is, it's all based on the science of what is the best thing when it comes to the sustainability of the forest.

I have great delight when colleagues of mine and friends from southern Ontario come up to northern Ontario and I take them out for a ride in my airplane, and I'll say, "Look out the side of the window. What do you see?"

And they say, "Well, I see trees."

And I say, "Look over the horizon. What do you see?"

"I see trees."

I say, "Can you believe that this has all been cut in the last 20 years?"

"You're kidding? How would I know that?"

"Well, because we do a good job with silviculture, and we make sure that when you cut a tree it's in fact replanted or there's careful logging or there's some mechanism by which you protect the forest."

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Now, what does that have to do with this? Well, because it's in the act. Bill 175 is going to make an amendment to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. The act currently says that those forest management plans and the carrying out of what's in those plans have to be done under the guidance of Ontario foresters and have to be certified by them. We have a standard here in Ontario that is far superior to that of any other foresters across this nation. So we are going to put ourselves in the position of presumably being in a spot where a company can say, "All right, I've got my forest management plan. I'm going to hire you, from another jurisdiction that has a lesser standard. Maybe I pay you fewer bucks, and you certify my plan." Okay. The MNR minister is going to say, "Yeah, but they have to follow the standard." My point is that that forester may not have the same training requirements as an Ontario forester who is trained under the CFSA.

So I'm just saying to the government, why are we rushing to the lower standard? We should be trying to move ourselves to a higher standard and say that across this nation we should have a system by which, if you were a forester, in this case, and you wanted to go to college to become a certified forester—which is a great job to get, if you're able to pass the program, and more importantly to get the job at the end in this particular economy is difficult—there should be a standardization across the country, to the highest standard. So if you are a forester in Ontario or British Columbia or NWT, at the end of the day you are trained according to a similar standard.

I look at other acts that are going to be changed by this particular act. For example, the association of professional engineers, as you know, is a self-regulating organization as well. It's going to mean that other professional engineers from across the country are going to have the ability to come to Ontario and work and compete with the professional engineers of Ontario, and they may not have necessarily the same training standard that our current professional engineers have in this province. I say again, why do we do that? We have spent billions of dollars to train people in colleges and universities in order to bring them to a standard in Ontario that we can be proud of. We pride ourselves, in this province, on having an excellent university-college system that has trained among the best in this nation, if not in the world in some cases. We are second to none when it comes to many of these certifications. Why in heck would we want to allow ourselves to be put in a position where our professionals, who graduate from our post-secondary institutions, have to compete against people who have a lesser standard? Again, why not follow the model of the European Union and say, "We will work to a standard that is equalized but higher, and one that is able to give us the standards that we need"?

I want to turn your attention to the other two acts that affect me directly—because as some of you may know, I'm an electrician by trade. It's going to affect the Apprenticeship and Certification Act and the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act. My friend Mr. Paul Miller will know this, because he's a certified tradesperson as well. We went through apprenticeship training in order to become certified in this province. That training, again, is one of the higher standards in Canada. I'm not saying there aren't other provinces that have similar training, but I can tell you there are some provinces have much lower training. I can get into stories about that, but that would be for another debate. My point is that what you are going to end up with is a situation where electricians, machinists, tool and die makers, welders, mechanics, carpenters, you name it—those certified trades that are out there are going to be in competition with those of workers who come from outside of the province who may have a trade certification that is less than that of Ontario. So I ask the question: Why did the province of Ontario spend the tens of thousands of dollars it spent to train me as an electrician to come to a certain standard, to attain that standard, and then say all of a sudden, "That training doesn't matter anymore, because we're going to allow a certified electrician from another province who may have a lesser standard to do your job here in Ontario"? Again, why not follow the model that we have in the European common union and work to a higher standard? Let's say that British Columbia was to have the higher standard than Ontario. Should we not want to try to meet British Columbia's standard on whatever certification it might be, or vice versa if it's Ontario? It's to the benefit of workers, it's to the benefit of the economy and it's to the benefit of everybody around.

So I say to my friends in the government, I want to make it very clear that I and other New Democrats are not opposed to trying to find ways to deal with barriers of trade between our provinces. That is a concept that we well understand, and in this day and age we need to find ways to trade east-west, even more so now that we've

done trade agreements such as NAFTA, the free trade agreement. But if you're going to do that, you have to, I think, work to the higher standard.

That's the point that I want to make in this particular debate, and I look forward to comments from members present this morning.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I want to congratulate my colleague from Timmins–James Bay. As always, he contributes very well to debate here, and I often enjoy his ability to bring to this Legislature the unique experiences that they face up north and what they're doing with the logging industry there.

One of the challenges that we in the official opposition find with this piece of legislation is that while the minister here will not accept or revise apprenticeship ratios to one to one, we will be recognizing certification in other provinces in which apprentice-journeyman ratios are one to one. That is something that my colleague from Simcoe North, in particular, has raised several times in this chamber, as has my colleague from Simcoe–Grey, Jim Wilson, who is the critic for this piece of legislation.

It's one of those concerns that we have and one that we're going to continue to push right up until 2011, when we face another election. I think it's something that this McGuinty Liberal government must look at. This, we feel, could put Ontario apprentices at a disadvantage in trying to find skilled trade jobs in this great province.

So I think there is more to be done, not only in this chamber but certainly across the province—how we can get those apprentice-to-journeyman ratios to be equal at one to one, and how we can ensure we are at a competitive advantage when dealing with apprentice-journeyman ratios elsewhere. We don't think that this is adequately addressed, and we'll continue to pursue that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank my colleague from Timmins–James Bay. It's good to have a fellow tradesman in the caucus who understands the ins and outs of the trades and crafts.

I would also like to bring forth a major issue here about safety and health. Safety and health are always foremost on the list of job sites. I can tell you about several projects in Hamilton that were non-certified-trades built. It has been a nightmare for years, to say the least, with plumbing problems, drywall problems, electrical problems, shorts—all kinds of things that happen in certain buildings. I don't want to name them in particular because I don't want to jeopardize their ability to rent. But the bottom line is, they did have to repair them over the years and bring them up to standards that were far below the acceptable level before.

I feel that if you bring in trades that are not as well trained, you are going to compromise safety and health. There may be stuff inside the walls that even inspectors can't look at because the job's done. They come in at different levels during the job, but sometimes things have been closed in and boxed in that they can't see and they're assuming that a certified tradesman in Ontario would take pride in his work and do a good job and not cut any corners. But as we know, in a lot of jobs people cut corners to save money and put it in their pocket.

I don't want those types of situations to happen in Ontario. I would like to see Canada-wide certification for all trades, and to be able to move interprovincially with no problem, no questions asked, and without having to write interprovincial tests, because they are qualified in Canada. I think that would be a much better atmosphere.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

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Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to engage in this debate for two minutes. We're hearing from the opposition that it's missing this, it's missing that and it's missing the other, and it's not a perfect piece of legislation. Back in 1994, there was the Agreement on Internal Trade signed, and nothing has happened. All the different governments had an opportunity to approach this. They didn't, and here we are today, trying to bridge some of that gap.

I just want to relate this—and I believe I related this to this House once before. In my own riding, actually in my own community that I'm fortunate to represent, there was a doctor from Nova Scotia, I believe, who wanted to come to practise in my riding. One of the biggest challenges was, here's a doctor who's qualified to practise medicine in Canada—in this case, Nova Scotia—but is not allowed to practise in Ontario without going through some major hoops. It created some challenges. As a matter of fact, after a long ordeal—and my office got involved to see how we could expedite this, but there was no way; that doctor didn't come to Ontario, although that's where they preferred to practise and they had some family here in my riding that they wanted to be close to. I think this will bridge that gap.

We hear about a national standard, national licensing. This certainly will open the door to that. We talk about how some professions may be not as qualified. That's why those exemptions are there. We want to make sure that the standards of folks wanting to practise their profession in Ontario are equal to or better than what we have now. If not, then there is an exemption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a few comments. Listening to the debate by the members in the last few minutes, I think that the most important concern that the bill must address is the fact that we are the first province to offer this kind of mobility. What that means, of course, is that there's nothing compelling other provinces to open their doors in a similar fashion. While there is definitely an advantage to being in a leadership role, in this particular case I'm not sure that you want to be first—not without the opportunity to move in concert with the other provinces.

The second thing is the question of the ratio, as other speakers have raised. As long as Ontario has a three-to-

one ratio for apprentices, this not only puts our young people at a disadvantage in their own province, but certainly not on a level playing field with those from other jurisdictions where there is a one-to-one ratio, and the same thing for areas where there's a significant difference in the level of training for particular groups that is not matched by the other provinces.

These are all very serious issues that the government needs to consider before the passage of the bill, before the proclamation of the bill, to make sure that when we open our doors, it's going to provide the very best for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Timmins–James Bay, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank the various members for their comments, and I just want to quickly say two things. One: My good friend the member from Northumberland—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Quinte West, thank you—that's why I will never run for the job of Speaker: I never can remember names of the ridings; I know their names and not their ridings—made the point that this would deal with the lack of doctors in our rural communities. I wish it was the case, because when I read the act, nowhere did it say it was going to change the college of physicians, who are the ones who are responsible for certifying doctors in the province of Ontario. What it does say is that there was already a change made in the Regulated Health Professions Act, which was in the Legislature earlier this fall. There are changes there to deal with other health care professionals, such as nurse practitioners and others, but it doesn't deal with the larger issue as far as I know, which is the college of physicians. I would look for some clarification on that.

It also leads me to the point: Even if it did include the physicians, Ontario is known as a jurisdiction that has some of the best training in Canada when it comes to various things, including physicians. There's a good reason why we limit people to practise to an Ontario standard; it's because we have a very good standard here. There are very few countries that you can go to, get your training and then come and practise in Ontario, because the training in Ontario is fairly specific and has a pretty high standard.

We do that for what reason? Patient safety. That's why we do it. We have a public health care system, and we decided some years ago that we need to maintain a higher standard.

To argue that we can lessen that standard by allowing somebody to be trained somewhere else at a lesser standard—and in Canada it's probably a little bit less of an issue but still is an issue. I argue that going to the lowest common denominator is not the way to go; it's about trying to get to the higher standard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: My engagement on Bill 175 is to try to bring a little bit of history and get us to this point and then to continue the debate about how this bill could be implemented and whether or not we would be, as we've been doing quite often, having consultations and continuing the debate about having hearings. We will be having hearings, and my understanding is that we will be having public hearings so that deputations can be made—as I've said in this place many times, all bills are fluid—to hope that we put together the best piece of legislation we can.

I want to speak very quickly to my friend from Timmins–James Bay on two points. First, there's his comment about the NDP saying they understand the theory behind what this bill is attempting to do and it is supported by them, and they understood that mobility is an extremely important issue. A couple of the members have spoken about a national approach to this. Consultations have been taking place since 1994. As that has been rolling out, I think it's important to point that out. I'll talk about that in a minute.

The other part that I wanted to make reference to is on the doctors' side. It does include the bill, and it does say that they have to reach the standard. Let's make it quite clear that when we have those foreign-trained professionals in terms of medical on the doctors' side and the dentists' side, they are, by this legislation, demanded to meet that standard. I don't think that we should be saying that's not the case out there. If there's a concern about it, which I've always said is a very legitimate thing to do in this place, you raise it, get an answer and say, "Yes, we now believe that's covered off," and that can be done in two or three ways.

One way it can be done is by going to the minister and getting that clarification through a request from the member's office, which has been done by all members of this place, where you've gone to a minister—and as a matter of fact, I've actually seen it being done in the House, where members will come over and sit down beside the minister to seek clarity and ensure that that's going to happen.

The second way in which that's done is through formal communication with the ministry on an interpretation of the bill.

The third way is through briefings, which take place on an ongoing basis. As an offer, the ministers that I'm aware of continually do that.

What I think is happening is, whether or not the members are asking that question in a legitimate way, they can proceed to do that and get clarity on that. If it's not clarified, then they come with an amendment that could change that direction that's being set.

The advice that I've been receiving, and the note that I received, indicated that in the case of doctors, which has been talked about, they will have to meet the standard that's established in Ontario.

So why has the government introduced labour mobility legislation? First of all, we're not the first. Manitoba has already done it and BC's legislation was produced, and I'm not sure, from the prorogation of the House in British Columbia, whether or not it died.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Was that an NDP government in Manitoba?

Mr. Dave Levac: Yes, in Manitoba. But in terms of being the first, we're not the first. Manitoba has already passed legislation. BC has already introduced it, and I think the bill was ready to be voted on, but they shut the House down.

This started in 1994. Before 1994, we had a tremendous problem in our country, and I don't think anyone would stand to say that they did not recognize that. We had a tremendous problem. There was no mobility. As a matter of fact, it was almost impossible to get jobs in other provinces. In 1994, the AIT, which is the Agreement on Internal Trade, at a national level, with all ministers and all those responsible for internal trade from whatever department they came from in the province that they represented, came together—so the territories, the provinces and the federal government of the day—to strengthen the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. That was the focal point. The focal point was to ensure that we stopped working against ourselves so that we had an opportunity across the breadth of our country to have the economic engine chug along.

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That's precisely what's happening with this piece of legislation. This piece of legislation is to say that that mobility is an important piece of the puzzle for our economic prosperity. That's why this piece of legislation is being introduced.

Contrary to some of the arguments that have been laid out, I am not convinced that this will be a race to the bottom. I am convinced it's the opposite: This will be a race to the top. Why? Because the government, our Ontario government, supports the red seal program as the model of labour mobility and common interprovincial standards for skilled trades, and this commitment is explicit in the proposed Ontario Labour Mobility Act, Bill 175. The red seal endorsement provides tradespersons with a competitive hiring advantage, because if they are red-seal-approved, it moves from province to province, from territory to territory, across the breadth of the country, as agreed upon in 1994.

That tells me that that discussion in 1994 is an extension—it found its way through to Manitoba, to BC and now Ontario. I think—this is a prediction, so you can hold me to it—we will be seeing these types of legislation pop up right across the breadth of the country.

We are in economic times that require us to look at all avenues possible to improve our economy and to land on our feet running when the economy does the uptick. That's exactly what the rest of the world is doing. We should not be left behind by not having legislation in place that allows for even our own mobility, to support our own country inside our provincial territories.

While many tradespersons were assured recognition for their qualifications from one province or territory to another through the interprovincial standards red seal program, workers in regulated professions continued to face barriers when moving between Canadian jurisdictions. That was the recognized reason for the 1994 accord. So what are we doing today? Well, if passed, this bill, Bill 175, would successfully support full labour mobility and allow more professionals and skilled workers across Canada to work in Ontario.

I think there's another piece to this that allows each of the provinces to design a bill that would be successfully supportive of the idea that there are professionals within our own country. It's not necessary for us to go looking to Europe or the United States. We should at least look into our own country to invite them to come and practise their trade in Ontario.

For us not to proceed with this type of legislation would be at our own peril, because as the economy moves up and recovers from this worldwide catastrophe, we need to be able to say to those people in Canada who have those skilled trades that we need, "Please come on board, because our mobility will respect that," and, importantly, there will still be a way in which we can raise the bar on expected standards of behaviour and standards of practice.

By recognizing the rights of the workers to full labour mobility, the proposed Ontario Labour Mobility Act would eliminate the delays involved in certifying workers. Anybody who has gone through the process, and anyone here who has heard those stories at their constituency offices about "I've been putting in for my ticket and it's been taking me forever. I've had to take job X, Y and Z instead of job A, B and C"—that part is being dealt with by the bill as well. So the time it takes on task to get that skill recognized in the province of Ontario will be expedited. It will be turned into a faster process.

That knowledge alone will permeate across the country to those skilled trades organizations that have national scope, so they would be able to communicate to their membership across the country that the time which it's going to take you to get your licence has been shrunk in Ontario. That, to me, is a communications issue that those organizations and this province would undertake to ensure that people realize that Ontario's doors are open for business on the skilled trades side.

It provides all Canadians with the freedom to work where they choose and where opportunities exist. As we start to move the economic engine again, people will be realizing, "I'm going to move to Ontario, because their economic engine is moving and chugging again." When that takes place, the word gets out, as it has in our history. Where the west was a place to go, where the economy was booming, people moved. Where now it's going to be rejigged and restarted in Ontario, we want to have the table set so that when they hear about that economic upstart, they will be joining us because, number one, we have a labour mobility act; number two, it's respective of all those skilled trades we are talking about; and number three, the doors are open in terms of how fast it takes you to get certified and qualified to perform those tasks in Ontario.

Having said that, one of the things I think we also need to review is the commitment by the Council of the Federation in their meeting of July 2008, where all provincial and territorial governments agreed to amend

chapter 7 of the mobility act of the AIT, the Agreement on Internal Trade, by January 2009, and to implement those amendments so that full labour mobility would exist for workers in regulated occupations by August of this year. Hence Manitoba's movement, British Columbia's movement, and now this movement that allows us to fulfill our agreement from 2008, the grandfather being 1999, where that agreement first was struck.

So please just take a few seconds to look back and ask yourself—before 1994, for those people who were around at the time and during the skilled trades issues particularly. I defer to my friend from Prescott and his knowledge of how it worked in mobility between Quebec and Ontario. When you take that, complicated by adding the rest of the provinces and the territories, you would see pre-1994 as a quagmire of mess for the transportation of those individuals trying to earn a living for their families. So then 1994 comes along and we finally get our act together, where the federal government and all the territories and provinces come together to say, "You know what? It's time for us to put this silliness away and coordinate this on a national level."

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek had made the comment about it at a national level. I don't disagree; I think that's one of the spots where we need to continue to push to ensure that when we do this mobility discussion, it's in concert with the agreements that already exist and the improvements that were agreed upon in 2008. Now that it's starting to happen, we are starting to see the types of legislation here that allow for that to be completed by August 2009, which we made a commitment to do.

In addition to this commitment, governments agreed to amend chapter 17, the dispute-resolution procedures at the AIT, to strengthen the dispute resolution provisions for government-to-government disputes over internal trade, including those related to labour mobility.

The other piece of this that's inside this legislation is to allow us to continue to take those barriers down and at least come to the table to discuss them with a dispute mechanism that allows us to actually put our concerns on the table, and have it done in a way that one doesn't walk away from the table as the loser and the other ends up being the winner. This is about the mobility of labour and any other intertrade mechanisms that show that the unity of our provinces and our country is strong enough to deal with trade.

One of the things that came up in a lot of conversations I had when I was talking about this particular topic to a lot of the companies out there was, if Europe can do it, if the United States can do it, why can't Canada do it? This nation was built on the capacity for us to go from coast to coast to coast, not only in the transportation issue historically, but also in the mobility of our workers across the breadth of this country.

There's a little bit of internal pride that should be recognized here. If we're not going to be able to conform to those issues, the business world, the industrial world, the world of work, will leave us behind and go to those jurisdictions that have the capacity to show their citizenry that they can move anywhere they want.

The European Union is getting it. The European Union is beginning to recognize that that mobility strengthens each piece of that union. In the United States, from state to state to state, they too have been grappling with this problem. But because they have been able to start to break those barriers down inside their own country, they are keeping that employment, and each state, each piece, becomes stronger for it. We should not be afraid of the very same theory that has already been proven to be successful. So what we should be doing is working collectively together to find out what is going to make us stronger in the competition in the global world and global economy and also a certain amount of pride that we have been able, inside our own sandbox, to get along. Therein lies the rub. This piece of legislation isn't punitive. This piece of legislation is enabling, which allows us to do exactly what we all know in our hearts is something we should be able to do.

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Traditionally, Canadians have not been terribly mobile. We've now gotten out of that mentality and started to shift to the capacity that, "Inside of my country, I can move from Vancouver, British Columbia to Toronto, Ontario, or Brantford, Ontario, or Thunder Bay, Ontario, or Montreal, Quebec, and feel that I'm still part of this whole big piece and making each one of it stronger as I do that." Instead, if we continue to not eliminate these barriers, what we have seen in the past—and I'm hoping that this bill will help move towards eliminating it—is all of that talent moving out of the country altogether and moving to the United States or shifting to Europe, and saying, "We're going to take these skills and move them there." Instead, we should be opening the door and making a loud proclamation: "It's moving to us." That's the national perspective.

From an Ontario perspective, by doing what we're doing, I'm convinced that what we've established is the message out there—and the messaging is very important—that we are open for business and if you have those skilled trades, please come on in.

There has been a voice of concern as to whether or not we are racing to the bottom. As I said earlier, I don't subscribe to that thinking. I tried to give evidence to one of the other concerns that was raised about doctors. I've been informed by the parliamentary assistant that that's not the case. As a matter of fact, that's protected inside of that. That makes sense to me, and it makes sense to me that we are going to be able to start to attract those people with those skills and qualities that are needed inside our businesses to continue that economic engine that is beginning to fire. Once firing on all pistons, we are going to be seen landing on our feet and running to ensure that when that mobility is established, they would come to Ontario when that new manufacturing economic engine begins to renew again. That would be my hope.

There are major elements of the proposed legislation that include the labour mobility code, which does talk

about the regulatory authorities in Ontario which govern how they treat the applications of individuals already certified in the same occupation by a regulatory authority in other provinces and other territories. The proposed code sets out a rule that a worker certified in an occupation in one province or territory would be certified in the same occupation in another province or territory without training, experience, examinations or assessments—again, the process of how fast it is for them to be certified to work in Ontario.

It would prohibit residency in Ontario as a condition for certification, which means the transportability of individuals—they don't have to live here in Ontario to apply that trade. It provides them with an opportunity to fall in love with Ontario, because once they're here, they'll recognize that, "I'm a tradesperson from New Brunswick or British Columbia. I'm applying for a big job here in Ontario. I kind of like it here." They can pick up roots and move here. As I said earlier, historically, we have had a habit of saying we don't like to be mobile. In the United States, on the other hand, they've got this unbelievable history of moving from state to state because they still believe that they're working in the United States and that's where their pride hangs. I think we should be modelling after that, which allows us to move from province to province to territory to territory. I hope that this bill would help spark that a little bit.

The regulatory stream is established quite clearly in this bill, authorizing changes to certification practices. That's another item that the bill does.

I'm running short on time and I've got five or six things to review but I'll try to get them done in a short time.

Line minister oversight: There's oversight by the minister to ensure that if there are some glitches in how this is being interpreted, the minister has the authority to move in and say, "This is what the implication was, this is what we are hoping to do, and that's what's going to happen."

Enforcement of the provisions: There are administrative penalties, there's recovery if a penalty is imposed on Ontario. There are consequential amendments required to other acts in order for us to make this work. There are ways in which this piece of legislation has been issued.

One of the things I want to make sure I cover before my time finishes is to ensure once again that inside the consultation—this was national in scope with other provinces and other territories. The second component to that was taking the 1994 agreement and making sure that by July 2008 we did a review. Now we have what we see this legislation as: a continuation of a consultation that has been taking place since 1994. From 1994 we now have this. There's nobody who doesn't know that this is a topic that has been discussed and that this is a topic that has had input from not only stakeholders in Ontario but stakeholders right across the country. From 1994 to now, we have had this capacity to put a bill together.

The good news is it will still go to committee and seek stakeholder comments and input on any of the other pieces of the legislation they believe would be better improved if we offered those amendments.

One last comment that I will leave us with is I honestly do believe in my heart of hearts that this type of mobility legislation is accepted by all members. It depends on how it's interpreted by some as to whether they will be voting in favour or not.

I understand how the process works; I appreciate that. But something that I think is not good for us is to not pass legislation by the end of our agreement of 2008 that simply says we want to have labour mobility in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to compliment the member from Brant. I think he gave a very fair and informed impression and interpretation of the legislation, and I commend him for that. I would like to be clear about that. But what we in the opposition are not going to agree with is we would like to strengthen certain provisions. Again, you're clarifying, as you're a former educator, that we don't want to have lower standards in Ontario. As you say, labour mobility—global mobility in the global economy—is an important objective, if you will. Ontario, as the largest province, should be setting the pace.

We have some regional issues; I'll leave it at that without getting into too much confrontation. But I can say he's right. Even when I was working in employment—in fact, I was in personnel, involved with General Motors, and I know the issue of trying to get visas between different countries and getting working permits. I can tell you globally—I have a son-in-law who's a securities lawyer. He worked for Cassels Brock here in Toronto and was recruited. Now he's in England; he had to write the British bar. It's not unique to us, but it is a global phenomenon. I commend you because I believe Ontario should take the lead, but at the same time, it should not lower standards.

Therein lies the real dilemma. We have internally, in Canada, different rules for different things. I've pointed out a couple. CAs, chartered accountants, would be one. Another one would be opticians, which I know to be a bit of an issue.

There are provisions—and this is what should be clearer here—in the third section. The following exemptions in the exemptions section set out provisions, and if you see it, it also says it may refuse to certify at the end of the process. It may require people to post bonds, have insurance and undergo other kinds of checks for ability etc.

I commend you for your comments. We would like to support it, but we need to be strengthening it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: In the two minutes I have, I want to try to make sense of this for people who might be watching or listening at home. I think most people across Ontario today, particularly once you get outside of the greater Toronto area, would say that Ontario is in deep

economic trouble. I know in my part of Ontario, the unemployment rate in the forest sector continues to grow. The mining sector is struggling. The general economy across the north is in trouble. I know if you go to Windsor or Chatham or St. Thomas or London or Oshawa, the auto sector is in trouble. I just read today that in Hamilton, more children are falling into poverty, and the unemployment rate continues to grow. This suggests to me that there are very serious economic problems—people are having trouble paying the hydro bill, people are having trouble paying the heating bill, people are having trouble paying for food to put on the table. More people than ever before are being forced to go to food banks to try to feed themselves and their children. I look at this and I say, "Boy, we've got some serious troubles here."

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Then I look at this bill and the amount of time the government is spending on this bill. I'm trying to relate: How does this bill do anything for somebody who is unemployed in northern Ontario? How does it do anything for somebody who is unemployed in Brantford or St. Thomas or London or Chatham or Windsor or Oshawa or Hamilton? I'm having real trouble making the connection, and I think people across Ontario are having real trouble making the connection. People feel we're in serious economic trouble, and they want some response from this government. I'm sorry, this bill doesn't do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: First of all, I want to compliment the member from Brant, especially the fact that he refers to the contents of the bill and also the importance of the bill.

I would say that this is one of the most important bills that the McGuinty government has said that it would bring to the attention of the people—one of the most important bills after the HST bill. Why am I saying that? Because the HST would create, we say, over 600,000 jobs. And we know, at the present time, that we are looking for investors, we are looking for people to create jobs, and we will have to be able to compete with other countries.

When I looked at the comments brought forward by the member from Timmins–James Bay, when he referred to the standards of labour mobility in this province, it's very clear, on page 27, section 35 of the bill, section 17 of the act, that it requires the certification.

I remember when we debated Bill 60 at the time, which was my bill on construction labour mobility. It took 10 years before we finally got the province of Quebec to agree, and we signed the agreement on June 2, 2006. Let me tell you, we said all along that whatever is required here in Ontario, the people coming in from Quebec had to respect our standards. It was the same thing for us if we wanted to go to Quebec: We had to respect the standards that they had in place.

But, today, this bill will give people living on the border of other provinces the chance to keep working.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: In principle, this bill is hard to disagree with. And I agree that the member from Brant made some very good comments today. I just have some issues, and that is, whether or not we are creating a level playing field for our own Ontario workers.

One of those professions that are concerned is the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario. They have some real concerns that they have to, without question, accept folks from other provinces and not ask them about their qualifications and whether or not their qualifications meet the standards that this province has set and, I think, that all audiologists in this province live by. I think that that begins to rock the boat a little bit. There's concern that this same thing will happen in other professions.

Those wrinkles need to be ironed out, but they need to be ironed out publicly, not in regulation, where nobody knows what happens until someone emerges from a closed room and says, "Here. Here's what you have to live with." So we need to understand how this works in protecting the professions that have set standards and live by standards in the province of Ontario now.

I think it would behoove the government to look at those things, iron out those wrinkles, but do it publicly, before the bill goes to regulation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member from Brant, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dave Levac: I do very much thank the members from Durham, Kenora–Rainy River, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Burlington for their measured comments. I appreciate the level of debate. That's exactly what we should be entering into on an ongoing basis, because this is talking about job, jobs, jobs, jobs, and I think there's a recognition of that.

As for regulatory streams that were mentioned by the member for Burlington, all bills carry regulatory streams. All bills within the bills that I'm referencing, in terms of the professions themselves, have actually in some cases asked for it to be dealt with in regulation. I'm not excusing the member's concern but I will come back to it and say that I hope that that comes out in hearings and that we do get staff to listen carefully to the concerns that are being raised.

The member from Durham brought up a very important point on an international scope. I would hope—and I have faith in this bill—that we may be seeing the repatriation of Ontarians, and not just from the rest of Canada. When they recognize that that mobility is there, we will start seeing a repatriation of some of those with those skilled trades. I think that's the possibility of this piece of legislation.

As for the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, we should be thanking him for all of the work that he's been doing on mobility between Quebec and Ontario. He started the ball rolling quite some time ago, even before I got here. I want to thank him for his tireless efforts to ensure that our ability to move from border to border is recognized.

I want to thank all of them. The member for Kenora–Rainy River made the reference that this bill has no implication whatsoever. I disagree with him vehemently. I think this is a bill that would increase the opportunities for jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs. I think he knows that. I don't know whether or not he wants to speak against the bill or whether or not he's basically saying, "Continue looking for jobs," which this bill will do.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to introduce the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, who will be here in the Legislature later on today, including Réjean Picard, Andy Kuyvenhoven and Len Roozen. I encourage all members to attend their reception in the dining room later this afternoon.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: It's my pleasure today to introduce the Wolfe family. Ann and David and their daughter Maggie are here in the members' gallery. They are the parents and family of Samuel Wolfe, who is our lead page today. They're all from the great city of North Bay. We're delighted to have them.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On behalf of my page, Vanessa Van Decker, I would like to introduce two guests of hers and ours in the Legislature: her grandmother Stella Madigan and her aunt Debbie Madigan, who will be joining us for the proceedings today.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature, from Nanticoke, Lake Erie steel, United Steelworkers Local 8782, president Bill Ferguson and some of the people with him: Ron Beaver; Greg Stallwood; Clayton Mereweather; Colleen Hall; Enzo Volpini; John Che-chak; Bob Smith; Bob Martin; Gord Parrington; Mike Phibbs; Kim Nanticoke; Denise Hicks; Mark Talbot; Young Mellenbacher; Don Dawson; Jeff Martindale; Mark Brock; Phil McCulla; Rob Clark; Jim Swing; Jim Armstrong; Cliff Homer; Bryan Kennedy; Ron Schmidt; Branco Jagodic; Gary Wills; Scott Jenereaux; Ron Maws; Emma Stephens; Patrick Verri; Sharon Hardwick; Paul Lacy—it's coming to an end, Speaker—Robin Hichon; Tom Jones; Larry Porrit; Dave Sinden; Ted Payne; Gary Rosehart; Ron Van Den Eckout; Keith Spours; Vinnie Hoskins; Bruce Brown; Rob Luke; Jerry Dejonge; Dave Stone; and Graham Carroll.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'd like to introduce guests of the page from my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, Melissa Bray: her mother, Yvonne Yen; her father, Randy Bray; her brother Nicholas Bray; her aunt Grace Kwan; and her great-aunt Margaret Kwan. They are in the members' gallery.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: We are about to be joined momentarily by three members from my community, three wonderful women who have given countless volunteer service hours, particularly to York Central Hospital: Nancy Cutler and Enid Mills from Richmond Hill, and Ellen Hoffman from the township of King.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to welcome the parliamentary internship program interns from Ottawa, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I trust the members will demonstrate the contrast between this Legislature and the House of Commons today. They are Josée Charlebois, John-Michael McColl, Alison Smith, Nathaniel Lowbeer-Lewis, Allison O'Beirne, Anna Hopkins, Brent Jolly, Janique Dubois, Leah Stokes and Vanessa Cotric. Welcome all to Queen's Park today.

M. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you'll allow me to indulge. À nos collègues qui sont ici d'Ottawa, c'est pour leur laisser savoir qu'on peut tout faire en français ici aussi.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Minister of Finance. November marks the one-year anniversary of the McGuinty Liberals' transforming Ontario from the economic engine of Confederation into a have-not province. Just yesterday we saw two new indicators that Ontario's economic prospects continue to slip under Dalton McGuinty: EI applications are up 83% over last year, and now Saskatchewan has surpassed Ontario as the second-wealthiest province in Canada.

Minister, according to your so-called "plan," how many more years will Ontario remain a have-not province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The challenges of the global economy have affected all of North America; they have affected much of the world. I would submit to the member opposite that, in fact, when one looks at what has happened to Alberta, British Columbia and others in Canada, the challenges we're facing, while enormous—we are certainly not alone in this.

With respect to equalization, with respect to a variety of other factors, I would point out that Mr. Orr, in the commentary he had in his report, attributed a number of the challenges that our manufacturing sector is facing particularly to the value of the dollar. In fact, this decline that he—and by the way, he is not saying it has happened; he is projecting it could happen, and there's a very big difference. All of these factors impact. That's why it's important to take bold steps. That's why it's important—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, obviously, these factors don't seem to be hampering Saskatchewan.

Quite frankly, Dalton McGuinty's "tax more, spend more, regulate more" policies have turned Ontario into a

have-not province receiving equalization payments for the first time in our history.

Minister, you told Ontario families that the so-called health tax would be good for them. You told businesses that your business tax increases would be good for the economy. Now you're telling Ontario families that your sales tax on everything is going to be good for them, too. Minister, why is it the only solution the McGuinty government ever has for our economy is simply to increase taxes more and more?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is cutting taxes over the next year. That member and his party, by their tactics, are trying to block a large tax cut for all Ontarians, to kick in on January 1, in a mere five weeks.

There is no doubt that there are enormous challenges in the global economy. In the case of Saskatchewan, they have the good fortune to rely heavily on potash. The member will know that the commodity prices do impact some provinces; they don't impact ours. This calls upon government to take bold and decisive steps, to face the truth, to bring forward plans that will create jobs and will help people transition to that new economy.

We intend to proceed with the tax-cut package we put forward. People will see their first tax cuts on January 1, 2010, unless that member and his party continue to try to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Only the McGuinty government could call lowering a tax rate that you jacked up in the first place a tax cut.

In fact, Minister, you know full well that in your catastrophic first budget you increased taxes through the roof to make Ontario among the most uncompetitive jurisdictions in which to open up a new business.

The reality is the McGuinty government has been so distracted by scandals that they've lost track of the basics, like jobs and the economy, and sadly, just like the McGuinty government is collecting welfare payments from the federal government through equalization, the provincial welfare rolls have swelled as a result. Some 68,000 more people are now on the welfare rolls of our province since Ontario became a have-not province.

To date, Minister, you've collected $347 million in welfare payments from the federal government. What did you do with the money? Did it go to eHealth or the Windsor—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite that Ontario paid itself because of a system that the federal government refuses to fix, and I can cite reference after reference after reference with respect to that.

The one thing the Leader of the Opposition hasn't said is what he would do.

We are faced with a global economic challenge.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will come to order, please.

Minister?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are faced with a global economic challenge. We have put forward a package of tax reforms that will lower the overall tax burden for 93% of Ontarians. Mr. Hudak and his party used to say they supported the HST; now they say they don't support the HST. Mr. Hudak and his party pretend to have answers when all they have is empty rhetoric and loud responses.

We remain committed to this. We remain committed to a better and brighter future for all Ontarians. We remain committed to creating jobs for those Ontarians that lost their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the finance minister: The backroom HST deal that you signed locks the province into your tax grab until 2015, according to the terms that are buried in the fine print on page 69. Minister, according to the agreement that you yourself signed, what is the earliest date when everyday necessities like home heating fuel could be exempted from your HST sales tax grab?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That top-secret deal is right here, line by line, signed by Jim Flaherty—

Interjection: Not a Magna budget.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: "Not a Magna budget," my colleague says.

It's very simple, Mr. Hudak. Read it; read pages 69 and 70. You can in fact get out of the deal; you just have to give the $4.3 billion back to the federal government. Now, the member opposite laughs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They said the deal couldn't be changed. In fact, we are proud to work with Mr. Flaherty, we are proud to work with Mr. Baird, with Mr. Clement, who at least have been consistent in their view on the harmonized sales tax. That's why they signed the deal: because they, like us, know that in spite of the political challenges associated with this, it is absolutely essential that we do everything we can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now we understand from the finance minister that Ontario can get out of the deal only if they pay the $4.3 billion that they're giving away to taxpayers with a bribe with their own money. If that is what passes for deep economic thinking among the Liberals, no wonder Ontario has become a have-not province.

There you have it. What the finance minister says, the Premier would not. You have signed a $4.3-billion poison pill. You didn't run on this greedy tax grab in the last election campaign. You're afraid to go out to get the public's support for your HST sales tax grab, and now we

find out that if the government tries to get out of your bad deal we have to pay a fine of $4.3 billion.

Taxpayers want to know: Why did Dalton McGuinty lock taxpayers into such a bad deal?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Four point three billion dollars—some poison, some pill.

Let me just ask the Leader of the Opposition, then, why is it he said, on March 24 this year—this is what the now Leader of the Opposition said: "We understand how that (single sales tax) can help the economy." That's Tim Hudak on March 24. A month later at the Economic Club of Toronto here's what he says: "I agree that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm finding it extremely difficult to hear both the question and the answer. I find it a little challenging when government and opposition members are shouting down their own questioners.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This is Tim Hudak: "I agree that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate taxes and policies and collect two separate groups of sales taxes." One day, he says one thing, and the next day he says another thing—no ideas and no plan for the future. We're about creating jobs for all Ontarians to get this economy back to where it should—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm going to have to check Hansard, but did the minister just say, "$4.3 billion—some poison, some pill"? You're darn right that's a massive poison pill. That's a lot of money to the working families in the province of Ontario, and it shows how deeply out of touch—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Government members will come to order—and the members from Cambridge and Renfrew.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It shows how deeply out of touch the Dalton McGuinty government has become after six years in office. Not content to raise taxes on Ontario families in 2010, Premier McGuinty now wants to raise taxes all the way to 2015.

Premier McGuinty had the gall to say, "I'm not going to make it easier for the opposition to undo a deal I'm profoundly proud of."

I say to the Minister of Finance, if you're so proud of your $4.3-billion poison pill, why did you bury it in the depths of an 80-page secret agreement?

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, I think the first time we mentioned it was on page 3 or 4 of the budget last March, so this is nothing hidden. In fact, it's been agreed to by two governments. It will be debated in the federal House as well.

Let me credit the member opposite. He's absolutely right: It is a lot of money for taxpayers. That's why it makes the deal possible. That's why we're able to cut taxes. That's why we're able to ease them into the new HST. Because the Premier is right: This is the right plan. It will create some 600,000 net new jobs, increase capital investment, and increase incomes for families. It's the right—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, New Democrats wrote to the government House leader indicating our willingness to support extending the legislative session to continue debate on the government's tax plan, but in exchange, the government must agree to at least five days of public hearings across Ontario.

My question is a simple one: Will the government agree to this?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is continuing to sit; we're continuing to debate this issue in the House. We have hosted more than 160 sessions across the province, including in opposition members' ridings—I've done those myself and taken questions. We will continue to work to get this package through the Legislature. It's had a lot of debate and a lot of discussion—more than 33 hours of debate in this House, which is an extraordinary amount of time.

It's the right package. It's about jobs and a brighter future for more Ontarians.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister is right: This government continues to consult, but in backrooms and at Liberal fundraisers. But everyday Ontarians, like the dozens of steelworkers that are here today in the chamber, are being shut out.

Their voices, in fact, are summed up by Jacqueline DeRoche of Exeter, who says this: "Don't put more of a tax burden on those that are just trying to make ends meet"; and pensioner Mary Jan Lyle, who writes this: "What happens when folks like me stop shopping because we can't afford the extra tax?"

Why is this government so afraid to hear from people like Jacqueline, like Mary, and the workers who are here today in our gallery?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We always welcome guests to the Legislature, and as much as you may desire to participate in the proceedings, you can't. That includes applauding or any other means.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we meet with organized labour all of the time. Just recently, I met with the outgoing president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. The day after tomorrow, I believe, I'm meeting with the secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress. My hope is that the incoming president of the Canadian Labour Congress will be there.

1050

Hugh Mackenzie did some wonderful work for the Steelworkers—and I believe he came up through the

Steelworkers. He says that this tax package is the right tax package for Ontario.

In addition, Jim Stanford, the CAW economist, is on my economic advisory committee. He peer-reviewed the work by Mr. Mintz and supported the principles that are outlined in that, that this is a job creation project that will help our manufacturing sector, help those workers in that sector, help the forestry sector and help those workers, along with many others across the province.

It's the right policy, it's the right plan, and I will continue to meet with organized labour on this and any other issue they want to talk about.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are feeling the pinch, and what they tell me they want is their government to listen to them.

Canadian Business magazine's annual survey of the wealthy reports that Ontario's billionaires are richer than ever, increasing their wealth in the midst of this recession. They're being heard at Liberal fundraisers and backroom meetings.

At the same time, on the other side of the coin, Statistics Canada reports that 22,000 more Ontarians claimed employment insurance this month—an increase of 83% since last year. The government will make their lives even more expensive, but they don't even get a voice.

My question is this: Why is the government refusing to hold hearings so that these people can be heard?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member for Hamilton Centre conveniently forgets a couple of factors about our tax package: We are cutting taxes for low-income Ontarians, and that is why a variety of anti-poverty groups, labour economists and others have endorsed the package. The member opposite forgets to mention that 90,000 low-income Ontarians will come off the tax rolls on January 1, if only she and her party would allow this bill to pass. They're trying to have it both ways. NDP increasingly stands for "never done pandering." You've got to look at the whole package. You've got to acknowledge what Hugh Mackenzie, what the Daily Bread Food Bank, what anti-poverty groups have advocated: that this tax package is indeed good for lower-income Ontarians; it's good for middle-income Ontarians; it's good for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm proud to be a New Democrat—the only political party that's consistent across this country on this nasty tax.

My next question is also to the Acting Premier. The arrogant McGuinty Liberal government expects Ontarians to simply shut up and accept their unfair tax scheme, but this government can't even get a commitment from their federal Liberal caucus.

My question is a simple one: Will the McGuinty government proceed with harmonization if the minority Parliament in Ottawa doesn't approve the federal government's transition funding of $4.3 billion?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The policy we have put forward is the right policy for Ontario. It will create some 600,000 net new jobs; it will lower taxes, particularly for Ontarians of more modest means. The future of this province, the future of British Columbia—that's why British Columbia decided to harmonize, because, as the finance minister and the Premier of British Columbia said, they will lose competitive advantage to Ontario if they don't. Four other provinces have harmonized.

We believe this is the right policy that will create jobs. It will help this economy get through a very difficult and challenging period of time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals in Ottawa have been asked repeatedly, and they won't commit to funding the McGuinty government's unfair tax scheme. In a recent by-election, in fact, the federal Liberals campaigned against harmonization as "the wrong thing to do."

This government says it has 4.3 billion reasons to actually do this, but the minority Parliament hasn't signed the cheque yet. So my question is this: Will the government abandon harmonization if the minority Parliament does not approve the transition funding?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The policy we put forward in the March budget is the right policy for Ontario's future. It is about jobs, it is about jobs in Ontario, it is about jobs for those people who have suffered the effects of the global economic downturn. We've put together a package that will build on the strengths of this economy, that is being recognized by economists on both sides of the spectrum, on the left and on the right; by anti-poverty groups; by business groups; and, by the way, endorsed by many Ontarians who I have spoken to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps the member from Trinity–Spadina and the Minister of Culture can continue their conversation outside, because you are interrupting the proceedings of the House.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This package is the right package for Ontario's future. I believe the government and Parliament of Canada will honour any deal they sign and treat Ontario the way that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Quebec have been treated.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister's new best friends in the Harper Conservative caucus are running away from the harmonization scheme. The finance minister's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm sure the government members want the Minister of Finance to be able to hear the question so that he can provide the answer. I would just ask that the government members please come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Peterborough.

Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister's own federal cousins do not support harmonization. If this unfair tax is such a wonderful idea, why does the government even need $4.3 billion in bribes to make it a reality? If it's such a great deal, they shouldn't need the bribes. What happened?

My question, yet again—and I haven't heard an answer to it yet—is this: What happens if Parliament simply does not mail the cheque?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I'm not going to debate the machinations of the federal House. I do note that the NDP are currently supporting the Harper Conservative government in the federal House. Those alliances do tend to change from time to time.

What I know is this: that in fact, our plan will create some 600,000 net new jobs for Ontario, it will raise incomes for Ontario, it will accelerate capital investment. It represents the right course of action to pursue. More than 130 other governments in the world have a value-added sales tax. Four other provinces have done it; one, since we announced, has announced they are doing it. It is the right policy for these times. It's about jobs; it's about a brighter future for Ontario families.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Health. I was at the public accounts committee hearings looking into the eHealth scandal. I couldn't believe it when I heard eHealth CEO Rita Burak say that she got a legal opinion about evidence of—her quote—"inappropriate practices" because she thought they were criminal.

Minister, which consultants and individuals committed the inappropriate practices that Rita thought were criminal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Following yesterday's question, I did investigate more what this was about, and we have actually released copies of the legal opinion that the chair of eHealth got in response to the Auditor General's report. She was showing responsibility and took the Auditor General's report seriously enough to seek the legal opinions, which found that in fact there was nothing to pursue with the allegations that had been made.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The minister seems to have forgotten that two ministers, the chair and the CEO of eHealth were dumped because of a billion-dollar boondoggle.

The McGuinty Liberals have shut down public accounts committee hearings into the eHealth scandal, just as Ms. Burak said she saw enough evidence of criminal activity to get a legal opinion. John McKinley was revealed to be the one who blocked the auditor's investigation and Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford implicated Sacha Bhatia of the Premier's office in the eHealth affair.

There are still a number of unanswered questions. If the minister cannot answer enough questions about eHealth, will the McGuinty Liberals agree to public hearings on the eHealth scandal?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I understand that the opposition wants to continue with this. We are committed to moving ahead with the implementation of the very important initiatives contained in eHealth. I do want to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not helpful from the member from Lanark, and it's not helpful hearing the voice of the Minister of Transportation.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do say that I have to take great exception to the characterization of the work at eHealth as a billion-dollar boondoggle. That is not what the auditor has said. The auditor has explicitly said that there has been tremendous progress made.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just read from the conclusion of the legal opinion that was sought: "For these reasons"—and they outline the reasons—"in our opinion the facts set out in the Auditor General's report do not provide evidence of a criminal offence." That is the conclusion that we got. This is available to all members of the public accounts committee, all members of Ontario.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, you will know that Payukotayno child services, as a result of your want not to fund that agency, as other agencies across this province, is about to lay off the workers. You know that Centre Jeanne Sauvé, in Kapuskasing, finds itself in the same position. Come January, if something doesn't happen, they will have extreme difficulty paying the bills.

I understand from discussions I've had with various people in children and youth services that one of the things that you are contemplating is to merge Payukotayno, which is a First Nations child protection agency, and possibly—who knows?—even Centre Jeanne Sauvé into larger organizations that may not be First Nations. Is that true? Would you deny or—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me be clear that we are absolutely committed to providing improved services for aboriginal children and youth on and off reserve to help them reach their full potential. We believe that wherever possible, aboriginal children in need of protection should be cared for in ways that recognize their culture and traditions.

We are the government that has designated more aboriginal children's aid societies, and we ended the previous government's moratorium on new CASs.

As I have said, we are working very closely with the leadership of all of these agencies, which have executive directors and board governance structures, working with them to find a pathway forward to sustainability. We work daily. We have folks on-site in Moosonee to work with the agency, and we continue to strive to find a pathway forward. But I will assure the member that no child will be put at risk in this province as we work toward that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The question I asked you was this: There are people within children and youth services who are saying to me and to others in those agencies that your ministry has been talking to other agencies out there about possibly taking Payukotayno, which is a First Nation child protection service, and putting it into a non-native organization.

That is serious for two reasons: One is the issue of child protection services for those kids on the James Bay, but also the issue of the autonomy of First Nations to be able to deliver their own services.

I want you, in this House, to confirm or deny that you're planning to merge agencies such as Payukotayno into larger child protection agencies.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me be clear and reiterate my respect for the leadership of those in aboriginal communities who seek to care for their children. We are working with the Chiefs of Ontario. I'm working with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to find a pathway forward for these communities who have been challenged for many, many years.

There's no doubt there's a great deal of work to do. We are doing that work daily. My ministry is actively engaged, working with the leadership across the north and in the child agencies that are struggling at this time. We continue to look for solutions. I'm committed to finding those solutions, and we will find solutions. We will find a pathway forward. We will find better outcomes for their kids. It is incumbent upon all of us to do that. The way of the past has not been working.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. A company in my riding, GRK Fasteners, the makers and importers of highly specialized patented fasteners from overseas, has been accused by their Canadian competitors of dumping product. These allegations have led the federal government to impose an 8% tariff on their product. Then, in February 2009, with only 24 hours' notice, they increased the tariff to 170%.

GRK has appealed to the CITT tribunal, and based on testimony given at this hearing, their prices are several times higher than those being charged for what the domestic industry calls comparable products. Exclusions to SIMA duties can only be granted if a product is demonstrated to be unique, yet descriptions which can be entered on CITT's product exclusion request forms can only be stated in very generic terms, not allowing the unique nature of this patented product to be demonstrated.

The tribunal's decision comes between now and March 2010. For this reason, Minister, I ask you: While this is a federal matter, what can your ministry do to keep GRK jobs in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: First, let me say that I applaud this member from Thunder Bay for his steadfast resolve in supporting jobs and businesses in Thunder Bay. In this time, when we suffer as we do, it takes that kind of leadership in local communities to make sure that the right authorities understand what the decisions they make have as an impact on our businesses.

GRK Fasteners is a case in point. I was delighted to hear from this member so that we could take it further to the federal government. We placed the case of GRK before Minister Day. I spoke with him directly last week. We afforded information to him so that he, too, would review this and ideally make us understand how a company would be charged with dumping and therefore have a tariff when in fact this price point is four times that of any other competitor in Canada.

This is a very interesting story. We want to see some federal action—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, I want to thank you for your role in trying to secure jobs and investment in the province and engaging your federal counterparts on this issue.

Ontario is changing, and job creation in my area of the province, especially in smaller communities, is vitally important. The economic downturn has created unexpected and challenging pressures for companies to look even more closely at costs incurred in operating their businesses.

For this reason, Minister, I ask you: What other steps is our government taking to engage other levels of government, both foreign and domestic, to improve the ease with which companies may do business in this province and, in turn, create and maintain jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I thank again the member from Thunder Bay, who is a steadfast supporter of business in Ontario and, in particular, in Thunder Bay.

It's important that our government support and lead in initiatives like the Agreement on Internal Trade, a trade agreement that took many, many years to resolve, but we have finally signed that, and that's for internal, interprovincial trade.

In addition, we are proud supporters of a potential agreement between Canada and the EU to open markets to our companies in Ontario. Whether you're in small-town Ontario or large cities, our companies are exporters, and we are doing what we can to promote further exportability by our companies.

GRK Fasteners is a case in point. That's why we need support at the federal level to support companies like GRK doing good business and hiring great people.

Having 40 jobs at risk in Thunder Bay isn't acceptable, and we want support on this front.

WINDSOR ENERGY CENTRE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the finance minister. You've been so distracted by scandals that you've turned Ontario into a have-not province. What did you do with the $347-million welfare cheque from the feds? We know you spent $81 million for an energy centre that has yet to produce a single watt of power, and that is to blame. Earlier today, the contractor gave you an opportunity to recoup the taxpayer dollars you wasted on the energy centre. What, Minister, is your answer?

1110

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite is referring to, I think, a rumour that's out there, because nothing has in fact been given to me. Now, whether or not something has been given to OLG is another issue. I wouldn't be speculating on that, and I remind the member that there are lawsuits with the individual—who the rumour has it is giving us an offer—and a countersuit, so that makes it difficult for me to comment on those matters.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Good to see that the minister is that up to date. You'd think the McGuinty Liberals would be eager to have someone take this Dwight elephant off their hands. This is your first anniversary of being the only government in Ontario history to accept welfare from the other provinces. There's no time to pretend you're too proud to do so. Ontario needs revenue, not a contraption that you say is a power plant but that certainly isn't working like one.

What is buried under the $81-million air conditioner that Minister Duncan needs to keep hidden?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government won't put down Ontario; we'll build up Ontario. We are in fact paying ourselves some $300 million in equalization payments. That is in fact true.

There are lawsuits outstanding around this energy suit. There is a lawsuit from the contractor against the OLG. There is a countersuit. The courts will be able to resolve these issues in a full and transparent manner, and I look forward to the courts having the opportunity to do that.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Last week, Ruth and Phil from my riding wrote me to say: We "just received your newsletter today and it has prompted us to send you an email letting you know how strongly we are opposed to this so-called 'harmonization' tax ... this is much, much more than a melding together of two taxes, it is a huge addition of tax on a vast array of services which are not currently taxed ... it is becoming more and more difficult for people such as Phil and I who are on fixed incomes and trying to hold on to homes we've lived in for years to make ends meet."

Why won't this minister and the government listen to Phil, Ruth and all other seniors?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: The question being on the HST, I'm referring it to my colleague Mr. Wilkinson.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'd like to say to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek that I would appreciate it if you could give me the name and the address of the people who wrote you back. I would like to see your newsletter, and I would love to have the address of those people, because I have a sneaking suspicion that perhaps the $15 billion worth of tax cuts coming to the province of Ontario over the next three years—maybe not all of that information has been disclosed to that senior couple. So I'd ask the member to do the honourable thing and send over the names of these individuals and their address. I'd be more than happy to write them after reviewing your newsletter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not sure the minister knows what her portfolio is.

Ruth and Phil also said, "Now they want to put taxes on our home heating cost, electricity, etc. etc. And the very idea of even more of a tax on car gasoline would be almost funny if it weren't so sad. Most of what we currently pay for gas is taxes and now they want to add more.

"A much better name for this tax would be a 'discordant tax' [as] there is much more discord than harmony to be found in it."

Why is it that Ruth, Phil and other seniors get what this tax is really going to do to them, but this minister and the McGuinty Liberals don't get it?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say to the member, are you somewhat afraid that perhaps I may share with your constituents the fact that their income taxes are going down on January 1? Do you have some concern that I may share with them the fact that we are enhancing the property tax benefits for seniors?

Now, it's very simple. I have asked the honourable member to send over the names of Phil and Ruth and their address so that I can write them. I will send you a copy, but I am looking forward to taking a look at the newsletter. I would trust that that newsletter—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East will please come to order.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would hope that if there was anything that went out paid for by this Legislature, that the story that was told to them was complete and accurate.

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Well, you just send me over a copy, then.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMS

Mr. David Orazietti: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. In investing $32.5 billion over the next two years in new infrastructure projects, we

are stimulating the economy and creating new jobs. On Monday, a new website that allows Ontario residents and businesses to track the progress of recently announced infrastructure stimulus projects in their community and across the province was put online by your ministry. It has the potential to be a valuable tool for engineers, architects, tradespeople and construction workers who are looking for employment opportunities. It will also be a great resource for residents in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, who are looking forward to the opening of public facilities such as the expansions at our post-secondary institutions and the new invasive species research centre.

Minister, I noticed on the website that only $11 billion of our investments are tracked on this site and that a number of approved projects have yet to begin. Can you tell us why these projects are not under construction yet?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question. I hope all of us will take advantage of the opportunity to look at this website, and particularly the public. It's Ontario.ca/infrastructure. It does track where we are on a very substantial infrastructure plan. As you know, we've got $32.5 billion.

The member is right: There are a substantial number of projects, and part of the website shows you how far along in construction we are. A substantial number have not started construction. I will say to the public that many of these projects must be complete by March 31, 2011—so they will be complete. They require, obviously, things like permits and tendering for construction. I can reassure the public that they are well under way. You can track them on a daily basis, and certainly we will be watching closely to make sure they are in fact complete by March 31, 2011.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Orazietti: Minister, that's great news for Ontarians. I recently had the privilege of attending several groundbreakings in Sault Ste. Marie that launched construction on a number of new and important public infrastructure projects: the $22-million Algoma Public Health building and the $16-million bioscience centre at Algoma University. Now that these facilities are being built, I know that some members of my community will want to follow the progress of the construction.

Minister, how frequently will the status of the projects be updated on the website? Also, will forthcoming projects that have yet to be announced be tracked by the website, in addition to those that our government has already committed funding towards?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: You'll find on the website 2,600 projects—a substantial number—and $11 billion of that $32.5 billion. There are, of course, many more projects to come. I will say we've been working in co-operation with the federal government on many of these. All of the projects on the website have agreement by the province and, where the federal government is involved, federal government approval.

The answer to the question is, we are going, in the next few months, to be tracking it monthly. We've tried not to be too bureaucratic, but I think the public will want us to keep them apprised of progress. So the answer is, monthly we will update it, and that there are about $11 billion of projects on the website—2,600 projects. Obviously we will be adding projects as we move up to that total program of $32.5 billion over the next two years.

More to come. Keep an eye on the website.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Education. Despite the fact that the Premier promised to address the issue of school closures in 2003, and despite the fact that enrolment has declined by 90,000 since 2003 and is projected to decline by another 50,000 within the next three years, this government has failed decisively to address the issue. Instead, you continue to rag the puck by belatedly setting up two reviews, but you fail to answer key questions for concerned parents, educators and municipal leaders, such as, at what enrolment levels are schools sustainable and how will you deal with declining enrolment?

Will you today, Minister, end the uncertainty and your government's silence and answer those questions?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows very well that these decisions need to be made at the local level. When she asks about the absolute numbers at which a community school would decide to close or not, she knows that we have elementary schools in this province that have 12 students in them and we have elementary schools that have 1,900 students in them. All of those decisions have to be made at the local level, so there are no absolute numbers that the ministry can impose on local communities.

What we have done since we came into office in 2003 is, we've opened 400 new schools across Ontario in the face of a decline in enrolment of 106,000 students.

Those community processes that bring in community members, school boards and parents to talk about what the best decisions for programming are for students are extremely important for communities, and we leave that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, Minister, as a result of your failure to take decisive action, others have stepped into the void, and the uncertainty grows. On November 9, the People for Education reported that 172 schools are scheduled to be closed and another 163 are under review. You dispute this in an article.

Minister, would you set the record straight? Would you end the six years of silence? Would you tell concerned parents, educators and municipal leaders how you are going to deal with the declining enrolment? They are looking to this government for leadership, and your Premier promised to provide it in 2003.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: One of the ways that we have dealt with declining enrolment is, we have provided more resources for school boards in order to buffer them

against declining enrolment. For example, we introduced a school foundation grant that allows boards, when they deem a school to be viable, to automatically have a principal and a secretary in that school so they can keep that school open even if there are fewer students in it than the year before.

We've put more than $5 billion more into the system. And remember, in relation to that declining enrolment, what we've said to boards is, "You need to make these program decisions in the best interests of kids. That needs to be a conversation in the community that takes into account the value of the school to that community and also the requirement for programming for those students." That's what the area review committee process is about. Those have to be local decisions. We are working with boards to make sure they have the resources they need, but those decisions have to be made community by community—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Events at US Steel's Lake Erie Works have revealed a huge loophole in Ontario's worker protection legislation. Hundreds of workers are being kept on indefinite temporary layoff status because the employer has arbitrarily locked them out. And as long as these workers are on temporary layoff status, they can't collect severance and they can't qualify for EI or Ontario Works.

Will the minister immediately close this loophole in the Employment Standards Act, or will he sit back while a multinational company deprives Ontario workers of their basic rights?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question, as it gives me an opportunity to say what we've been doing in the province of Ontario when it comes to employment standards. We've strengthened enforcement, we've ensured that we have stronger laws now in the province, and we've reached out to employers and labour groups to ensure that they know their rights here in Ontario. We've done more to enforce employment standards laws than those two previous governments, the NDP and the Tories.

Between 1989 and 2003, there were 97 prosecutions in this province; since 2004, there have been 1,800 prosecutions initiated in the province of Ontario. That speaks volumes to how this government is committed to the hard-working men and women of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The volumes that these workers want to hear is a commitment from this minister to do the right thing by them. As the minister should know, temporary layoffs, under the Employment Standards Act, are supposed to last no more than 35 weeks. After that point, laid-off workers are supposed to be considered terminated and able to qualify for the benefits available to unemployed Ontarians, but the act allows an employer to arbitrarily lock out workers and stop the 35-week countdown during collective bargaining. This glaring loophole can be fixed with a very simple change to the Employment Standards Act.

With dozens of workers here today who are desperately needing his help, will this minister commit to making that very simple change that will change their lives in a very positive way?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: To all the workers in Ontario—and to this member, who I think didn't hear me the first time—from 1989 to 2003, under that member's government, there were 97 prosecutions. Since we came into government, from 2004 to today, there have been well over 1,800 prosecutions.

What else are we doing? We're recovering monies for workers that are owed those funds. In the last five years, we've conducted close to 11,000 inspections, and we've recovered $7.7 million in owed wages and other monies to vulnerable workers. I know the member does not want to hear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I am going to take this opportunity to offer my final warning to the member from Hamilton East.

Minister.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I know the member doesn't want to hear this, but those are the facts: 11,000 inspections, recovering $7.7 million in owed wages and other monies. So I would hope that the member would get behind what this government is doing, which is more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In March 2008, we watched as our government closed the doors to Ontario's outdated institutions—institutions where sons and daughters, brothers and sisters with intellectual disabilities had been isolated from their communities for decades. Now our loved ones are living happy and healthy lives outside of institutions and in the community, but the reality is that they need our support.

Minister, last year, when the institutions closed their doors, you told us that things were going to change. You promised that we would have a more inclusive society where supports would be based on individual needs. What are you doing to make this vision a reality?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for his involvement. As a chair of a school board, this MPP welcomed in his schools a lot of these people who have developmental disabilities and who need our support.

First, let me assure you that this vision is still very much intact. Just this past summer, we posted our first regulation for public review. Thank you to all of our part-

ners—agencies, families and people with developmental disabilities—for their feedback. In the coming weeks we will post our second regulation under our new legislation for public review and feedback.

In addition, we are working with regional communities to ensure that the new access points for families meet their specific needs. This is the first major change to developmental services in 30 years, and for our families we need to make sure that we get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Johnson: Thank you, Minister. I am reassured by your response and I appreciate your efforts on behalf of all the families touched by developmental disabilities.

I am intrigued by the forthcoming regulation. Can you tell us more about what we can expect from this regulation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This regulation is incredibly important for the health and safety of our loved ones in care. The new regulation will establish quality assurance measures for service agencies for those providing residential care and for those helping families navigate the application process.

Since the day when the institutions first opened, our perception of people with developmental disabilities has evolved. We have a better understanding of their needs and of their families' needs. We continue to learn, thanks to the advice from agencies, families and people with developmental disabilities. We continue to work hard towards proclaiming the new legislation.

We still have more to do, but we are proud of our accomplishments and work so far. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the families and partners who helped us to achieve this important milestone.

1130

HYDRO CONTRACTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Why would your government be willing to pay a private power producer up to eight cents a kilowatt hour, causing ever-increasing power prices to our consumers, when our regulated power provider, Ontario Power Generation, only receives 3.2 cents per kilowatt hour for their regulated hydraulic resources? Why?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: The member probably knows this, but I'll repeat it for him. The actual negotiations take place between an organization called the OPA, Ontario Power Authority, and in this case a hydro dam. The purpose of this is to ensure that Ontario continues to have clean renewable energy. There are several of these electricity-producing hydro dams that require a fair bit of refurbishing and whatnot. Ontario Power Authority wanted to make sure that they would continue to operate for the future, so they did their role. They sat down and negotiated—in this case with a hydroelectric producer—arranged the best possible price for the ratepayers and also made sure that this organization had, for the next 20 years, a renewable resource—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some deal for the ratepayers. Minister, you know that this year there was never an inadequate supply of hydraulic power. In fact, OPG was forced to dump water without spinning turbines many times this summer because the demand was so low. In fact, there were times that we sold power to the United States at less than a cent per kilowatt hour. There was no shortage. The fact remains that Ben Chin's umbilical cord is connected to the Premier's office. He never left there.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw that.

We all know where Ben Chin came from. He came from the Premier's office and became vice-president of the OPA. Is this another one of those backroom deals that George Smitherman signed before heading out the back door?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I've reminded the members before about referring to members by their riding names.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —that the former Minister of Energy signed before he went out the back door so he could campaign for the mayor of Toronto while still collecting an MPP's salary? Reveal all of the details of these backroom deals so the people of the province of Ontario know how the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I really find that a bit unbecoming and offensive. I think the public should know this: The head of the Ontario Power Authority, the president, Colin Anderson, a former deputy here, a man of impeccable credentials, is one of the most respected people I know. He is responsible for this. I find it, to say the least, offensive that you would smear someone like Colin Anderson with a broad brush. I say to the member, I would be very cautious about how you deal with people's reputations. I have enormous respect for Colin Anderson and his integrity. I find it disappointing that you would use your immunity here to smear the Ontario Power Authority. I find it unacceptable.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, not a week goes by without new allegations of questionable activity in the city of Vaughan. An audit revealed 114 municipal audit infractions related to the election—the former mayor took $180,000 without declaring from whom it came; $14,000 in taxpayers' money was used by the CEO of the city, and that is still being questioned; $30,000 in contracts were given to immediate families of council members. Now new allegations that yet another councillor is in a conflict-of-interest position have been filed with the courts. The citizens of that city now refer to Vaughan as "the city above the law."

Will the minister exercise the authority of his office by calling a provincial investigation?

Hon. Jim Watson: This is the second occasion the honourable member has tried to undermine a locally elected democratic council. As the member knows, I cannot comment on matters that are before the court with respect to the Municipal Elections Act. But I can quote, from Vaughan Today, the honourable member who represents that community, Mr. Shurman: "'Michael Prue doesn't know what he's talking about,' said Shurman in an editorial board meeting with Vaughan Today last week."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm going to make some comments about language at the end of question period. I just ask that we be cautious when we're quoting and bringing other members into these situations.

Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The member from Thornhill has already apologized to me for the comment. You should too.

The minister loves to say that the city of Vaughan is a well-run city, yet every week there are more allegations of unscrupulous behaviour on the part of its elected officials. At what point in time is the minister going to say enough is enough?

The taxpayers of Vaughan need to know the truth: the taxpayers of Vaughan who are forced to go to court at their own expense, the taxpayers of Vaughan who are told they have to pay $32,000 for a freedom-of-information request, the taxpayers of Vaughan who are really under the gun.

Will the minister call for an immediate provincial investigation to determine that truth, or will he continue to do absolutely nothing?

Hon. Mr. Watson: Let me continue reading from Vaughan Today:

"Shurman sides with Watson when it comes to drafting a solution to council's woes.

"Both say that rather than having the province step in, citizens should take up their issues at the ballot box next year."

Quote from Mr. Shurman: "'If Vaughan has any problems at the senior level, they are political problems, and if people don't like the politics of Vaughan they should elect new councillors, or a new mayor,' Shurman said."

We have had staff go in and review the financial operations of Vaughan. We do not have problems with the administration of the financial operations. If the citizens of Vaughan have a difficulty with their council or mayor, they can take action, as the honourable member from Thornhill has said.

And I agree with the honourable member when he said, "Michael Prue doesn't know what he's talking about." I concur with the honourable member from Thornhill.

Interjections.

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The personal attacks back and forth are not helpful. There were some issues yesterday with some questions. I've asked members to withdraw comments that we continue to hear.

You know what? There are 107 of us in here. We were all duly elected by our constituencies. We've all been sent here with a job to do, whether it's a job as an opposition member, a job as a government member or a job as a Speaker.

At least, if nothing else, we can use language that is parliamentary and at least respect each other for the jobs that we have been sent here to do. I just really would ask all members, on all sides, to be conscious of that. Thanks.

To continue: As I have done on other occasions, I would once again seek the co-operation of all members in raising us to a higher level of decorum in this place, notwithstanding that sometimes a moment of heated debate tempts us to do otherwise.

It is important for the dignity of the House that we use temperate language and not language that is going to inflame further debate.

Specifically, today I'm troubled by accusations with the use of the word "bribery." It has been ruled at least as far back as 2002 in this House as being unparliamentary. I heard it stated in questions; I heard it stated behind the scenes. I just wanted to let you know that such an accusation, directed at any member or the collective of members, can only be viewed as insulting and disrespectful, and likely to cause disorder.

Once again, I'm asking that all members refrain from making those accusations in the future. It is language that I will ensure I will be calling the honourable members on, whether they say it in a question or behind the scenes.

1140

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier, during questions to the Minister of Health, the minister quoted from a document in her briefing binder, otherwise known as the House binder, that said basically to see if there was enough evidence existing to lay charges in relation to the eHealth scandal.

I want to draw your attention to Erskine May, page 441. It reads as follows:

"A minister of the crown may not read or quote from a dispatch or other state paper not before the House, unless he"—or he or she; unfortunately, it says "he"—"is prepared to lay it upon the table. Similarly, it has been accepted that a document which has been cited by a minister ought to be laid upon the table of the House, if it can be done without injury to the public interest." I would argue on that particular point that obviously, this document is within her briefing binder, so if somebody put it in the briefing binder, they thought it was not an issue—that it was a subject of public interest.

It goes on to say, "A minister who summarizes a correspondence, but does not actually quote from it, is not bound to lay it upon the table. The rule for the laying of cited documents does not apply to private letters or memoranda." I would argue again on that particular sec-

tion, if it's a private letter or memorandum, it would not be in her briefing binder. The briefing binder is brought into the House to be used, basically, as information for responses to questions from the opposition. So clearly, these are not documents that are private in nature.

It goes on to say on page 442, "On 10 August 1893, the Speaker ruled that confidential documents ... of a private nature passing between officers of a department, cited in debate, are not necessarily laid on the table ... especially if the minister declares that they are of a confidential nature." I would argue again, it is in her briefing binder. She is not declaring that it is private in nature.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take a look at Erskine May, page 441, under, "Citing Documents not Before House," and to rule if, in fact, she needs to lay that document before the House, because she did quote from it at some length.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Perhaps I can lay this issue to rest. That document that was referred to by the member for Timmins–James Bay was tabled in public accounts yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm not aware of the document being tabled in public accounts, and certainly the minister did not make us aware of that in the House.

I have to share my colleague's concern with respect to the fact that the minister herself referenced this in a response to an opposition question, I believe yesterday. I would suggest to you, Speaker, that you consider this and look at this in terms of it being an infringement on the rights of the minority in this place. Again, that's what's happened here today.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nickel Belt.

I'm prepared to rule on this.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Peterborough.

This is an issue that has arisen on numerous occasions. The clerks' table has cited numerous examples of quoting from documents and rulings by Speakers at least back to 1980, and some actually going further back than that. The general rule that has been set by the Speakers over the years is that when a minister cites a document in the House, he or she should, as a courtesy, table it. The members weren't aware until just now that this had been tabled at committee yesterday. But I would say that, as a courtesy, if you're going to cite at length from documents, they should be tabled in the Legislature.

We certainly recognize that a casual or a brief reference to a document not before the House places less of an onus on the minister to table it, but any document that's quoted at length should be tabled. Again, as a courtesy to the House, the document quoted from—ensure that it is available to the other members.

The comment was made that it was tabled at public accounts. Perhaps out of courtesy, the minister would table it here as well.

Government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Further clarification on this as well: I understand that in the late show last evening, the member for Huron–Bruce referred to it and referred to the fact that it had been tabled in public accounts.

M^me^ France Gélinas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was at public accounts this morning and I looked through the documents that were circulated. I did not see that particular document.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As the chair of the committee, we didn't sit yesterday—number one; number two, we had a meeting this morning, and I didn't receive any additional documentation from the clerk, and I certainly didn't receive this document.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps I can add some clarity. The clerk of the committee had the document. The document was tabled with the clerk last night, and the Clerk has assured me that that will be distributed to all members this afternoon. But it was tabled with the committee.

Pursuant—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Kenora–Rainy River and the Attorney General, I would encourage you to continue your discussion outside.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order, Speaker: I think the House would be interested to know that in the late show last night, the entire letter was read into the record, so that information was available there as well.

The House may be interested to know that following the question from the member from Oshawa, I did send him directly the letters that we've been referring to.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Speaker: With regard to this matter, I think it would be helpful for all members if you could provide some clarity. All members were under the impression, based on the words of the minister, that this document was tabled with the committee. I would like—

Interjections.

Mr. Frank Klees: Here is the clarification that I believe would help all members, and that is in terms of the terminology that is used. If, in fact, the document is presented to the clerk of a committee, is that in effect tabling with the committee? If it is, we should know that. If it is not, if it is tabled with the committee when the clerk in fact distributes that material to members of the committee, which is how I would interpret it—I as a member have no way of knowing whether a document has been tabled with the committee unless I receive it. In order not to in any way leave members of the House with a false impression of what took place, I think it is appropriate that we have clarification on this matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The process that was followed is in order. The document was tabled with

the clerk. The normal process would be that upon receipt of that document by the clerk, when the next dispatch of information that would be going out to the committees, in this case the public accounts committee—the clerk would be sending those documents to the committee members. But in the eyes of the clerk, that document is filed with the committee.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I just want to indicate, I withdraw an allegation I made earlier today that was unparliamentary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I appreciate that.

M^me^ France Gélinas: On another point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Health just said that yesterday in the late show—I don't know how we refer to this parliamentarily. After 6 o'clock last night, I was here and I listened to her parliamentary assistant. She read bits and pieces of that letter with a lot of editorial in between. She certainly did not read the letter for the record like the Minister of Health just said.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Again, I can go back to numerous references of quoting from documents, either quoting a document in its entirety or making references citing specific points. So quoting from the document is quoting from the document, whether it is read in its entirety or with highlights from that.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Oshawa has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health concerning eHealth. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance concerning the Windsor Energy Centre. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure concerning hydro contracts. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

Mr. Robert Bailey: It is a pleasure for me to welcome the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance here today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus as well as the rest of the Legislature.

Ontario has a strong agricultural economy and the greenhouse industry is a strong contributor to that economy. The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance was created in 2001 when the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, Flowers Canada (Ontario) and the Ontario Pepper Growers came together so that they could present a united front on behalf of the entire industry. TOGA's—an acronym for their name—goals are to establish the highest levels of production standards in the world and to increase consumer awareness of Ontario greenhouses and production excellence.

Here are just a few facts about Ontario greenhouses. Last year in Ontario, the greenhouse industry had over $270 million in gross annual payroll and they directly employ 17,300-plus employees.

According to TOGA, there's currently over $2 billion directly invested in greenhouse structures in Ontario, and that's not taking into account warehouses or associated businesses. At the current rate of growth, the greenhouse industry expects to increase that investment by about $20 million per year in rural Ontario. Think of the jobs that this will create, both directly and indirectly.

Members of the House will also be interested in the fact that an acre of greenhouse yields six times more than an acre in a field under cultivation.

The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, as an industry organization, does a tremendous job in advocating on behalf of greenhouse growers. I wish to congratulate them on a successful year and would like to remind all members that they are hosting a reception for the members and their staff in the legislative dining room this afternoon.

RUBY HAMILTON

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I rise in the House today to congratulate a very special member of our community, Mrs. Ruby Hamilton, who turned 90 years old this past Monday, November 23.

Mrs. Hamilton, born Ruby James, has spent all of her life in Russell township. Born and raised on her family's farm, Ruby married her childhood friend, Clelland Hamilton, the young boy she would visit as a child at the neighbouring farm. Clelland and Ruby were married in 1939 and together operated their dairy farm before Clelland passed away last year.

The first Hamiltons immigrated to Canada from Ireland in the 17th century. They were one of the first families to settle in rural Russell township and have remained there ever since.

Last Saturday it was an honour for me to celebrate Mrs. Hamilton's birthday with her family, and I wish her all the best. I thank the staff of the Limoges St-Viateur Nursing Home for the great care they have provided to Mrs. Hamilton.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: In March, I asked the then Acting Premier for government action on the US Steel lockout, the layoffs now affecting over 1,300 workers. I was told,

"We want to try to broker a solution." Nine months later, the steelworkers in the House today were left with empty words.

Nine months ago, the government told me it would talk to union and management. Have those talks taken place? I've spoken with union and management; MPP Paul Miller has spoken with union and management. Thirteen-hundred steelworkers sitting at home destroys our local economy. It's not just about steelworkers: Everyone wants both sides back to work again.

After 35 weeks of temporary layoffs, laid-off workers are supposed to be able to qualify for EI. However, the Employment Standards Act allows an employer, in this case US Steel, to arbitrarily lock out workers and stop the 35-week countdown during collective bargaining. Workers can't qualify for severance, they can't qualify for EI or Ontario Works. These steelworkers aren't on strike; they're laid off, they're locked out and they are caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22.

Christmas is coming. They are losing their homes. The minister has the power to open up the act, open up regulation and close the loophole. If government is not already talking to the parties as it said it would, I ask them to speak now. If the minister is not already acting to ensure support for steelworkers, act now.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As they say around this place and in literature, "The plot thickens." We are now finding that the government has a goal when it comes to children's aid societies, and that is, in order to deal with what they see as, I could almost argue—fiscal mismanagement is what they're arguing. They're looking at trying to start merging particular children's aid societies together.

I just want to remind members why it is that we created aboriginal child and family protection services and why we did so for francophones. In many communities, as the member from Brant would know, there are cultural and language differences when it comes to how we deal with our kids. In the days before we had Payukotayno and the other child protection services up in the northwestern part of Ontario, those services were provided by run-of-the-mill regular children's aid services. They tried their best. This is not to say that they were not trying their best, because they actually did. They've got professional staff who work hard, but they were not well suited to deal with the issues of First Nations.

There is, yes, a language issue, but there's also a huge cultural difference, and also the understanding of the community and an understanding of where some of the dysfunction comes from.

We decided some years ago that we would create these agencies in order to allow them to deliver services to their own people. We now have legislation that says they must provide these services to the people of James Bay and northwestern Ontario, and for you down in your part of the province as well. If they are not funded, it is not their fault; it is the fault of this assembly. And for us to go down the path of possibly merging these organizations into a larger, non-aboriginal organization, I think, is a very slippery slope for us to go down.

LIBRO FINANCIAL GROUP

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to congratulate and thank one of southwestern Ontario's most successful financial institutions, Libro Financial Group. Apart from their success, they are devoted to giving back to the community though their community builder grant. Their objective is to help build confidence in youth who will contribute to community growth for generations to come. It gives opportunities to youth to develop leadership and career skills while participating in and leading community development projects.

It's a truly unique endeavour. It gives London's young and talented hopefuls the opportunity to collaborate as a team and design community-based projects and explain the implementation, management and financial steps needed to make them a success.

Students from all across southwestern Ontario participated, and to witness every project's potential was inspiring. The winners of the grant saw a prize of $10,000 annually for three years to ensure the implementation of their project.

Ontario youth are talented and intelligent. To see so many ideas created for the sake of supporting local residents shows that we are and always will be Canada's leading province.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the management and the leadership of Libro Financial Group for their determination in supporting the community and investing back in our community, because it's important to support it.

SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Regrettably, the Minister of Education has been silent while independent school bus operators in the county of Wellington are threatened with the total loss of their business. In small-town and rural Ontario, the school bus is ubiquitous, morning and afternoon. We entrust our children to the safe care of our courteous and well-trained local school bus drivers. Many of these family businesses have transported students and served our communities for generations. They are local; they provide an essential service; they are cost-effective; they sponsor local minor sports teams; they buy their fuel, parts, tires and insurance locally; and they are firmly rooted in our communities.

Why would the McGuinty Liberal government want to fix something that isn't broken? On many occasions in recent months, I have met with school bus operators and written the Minister of Education on their behalf urging a review of the minister's flawed request-for-proposal tendering process. We have asked for an alternative approach which would give greater recognition to existing service in the criteria, as well as for a further review of the RFP pilot project and its results.

The minister promised fairness to our local school bus operators, but has delivered the opposite. Surely she understands that the cost of student transportation will only go up over time if our local school bus businesses are driven out of business. If a small number of huge, foreign-owned school bus companies grow to cover the whole province, they will eventually dictate price and dictate it upwards. This is always the way with monopolies. I call on the Minister of Education to keep her promise to school bus operators, halt this RFP process now and ensure that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1510

LAST POST FUND

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Last Post Fund.

The president of the Last Post Fund, the Ontario fund, is a former member of this House, Lieutenant Colonel James Breithaupt, who served as the MPP for Kitchener from 1967 to 1984.

"The Last Post Fund is not a charity, it is a duty," is a quote from the founder, Dr. Arthur Hair, when it was established in 1909, and galvanized by a sense of "sympathetic camaraderie of one soldier for another."

In collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada, the fund ensures that no eligible veteran is deprived of a dignified funeral, burial and headstone for lack of financial resources.

For the past century, the fund has arranged funerals and, where necessary, burial and grave markers for 145,000 veterans from Canada and other allied countries. The fund's own cemetery, the National Field of Honour, in Pointe-Claire, Quebec, is the final resting place for over 20,000 veterans, and military markers now identify unmarked veterans' graves.

The Last Post Fund has never deviated from the principles of dignity, compassion and respect that presided over its birth.

I'm pleased to acknowledge the tremendous work being accomplished by the Last Post Fund and express my sincere gratitude to Lieutenant Colonel Breithaupt for his invaluable contributions towards honouring our veterans.

TAXATION

Mr. David Orazietti: I rise in the House today to comment on our government's tax reform initiatives.

Economists from every political viewpoint agree that harmonizing our tax would be good for businesses and consumers in Ontario. Noted economist Dr. Jack Mintz said our plan would create nearly 600,000 jobs and increase the incomes of Ontarians. The TD Bank and professors Michael Smart and Richard Bird of the University of Toronto said that tax reform savings will be passed down to consumers.

Studies in Atlantic Canada, where tax harmonization already exists, suggest that overall prices fell following implementation.

The Fair Tax Commission set up by the NDP recommended Ontario exempt all business inputs from the retail sales tax and harmonize our sales tax.

Last year, the Conservatives suggested we take the advice of economist Dr. Roger Martin's report on competitiveness and reduce the level of business income taxes as part of a plan to grow Ontario's economy. Just a few months ago, the Conservatives agreed that there is no sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate taxes.

As the global economy has changed dramatically, we have moved forward to modernize our tax system and strengthen our economy. By harmonizing our tax with the federal government, we will be joining four other provinces in this country, as well as the decision that BC has made to join in harmonization as well.

Our plan also cuts income tax for 93% of Ontarians and means that we'll have the lowest personal income tax rate of any province in Canada. Under our government, I've seen more investments in northern Ontario and more investments in my community of Sault Ste. Marie than ever before.

As we begin to see positive signs of economic growth—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Mr. Speaker, I know that you and all of my colleagues will want to join me in welcoming the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance to Queen's Park today, and many of their members are sitting here in the east gallery.

I know, as well, that we're all going to want to go to our whip's office, get our certificate and go down and say thank you to them for visiting with us today—because I expect there might be beautiful poinsettias, there might be some great home-grown veggies down there—that we will want to shake their hands and thank them for what they do in the province of Ontario.

You know, these greenhouse growers, who are the vegetable, the pepper and the flower growers, make up the second-largest agricultural industry in the province of Ontario. We all know how much the Speaker has been promoting home-grown Ontario fruits and vegetables and all the good things that come from our agricultural community. We can go downstairs today and thank one of the finer groups in this province for what they do and what their agricultural products mean to all of us, say hello to them, wish them a merry Christmas and welcome them to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I honestly thought that the honourable member was going to start chanting from one of my favourite movies, Animal House, "Toga! Toga!" Welcome to Queen's Park, and thanks for the good things that you do day in and day out in putting

great food on our tables. I might be lobbying for an extra poinsettia or two.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AMENDMENT ACT (INSTITUTIONS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ACCÈS À L'INFORMATION ET LA PROTECTION DE LA VIE PRIVÉE (INSTITUTIONS)

Mrs. Savoline moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 227, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act / Projet de loi 227, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: This bill amends the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act by adding 21 government agencies that are currently not subject to the act to the list of institutions that are in the act. By making these agencies subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act legislation, we can ensure that information about publicly funded agencies is accessible to the public.

This is really a bill about accountability and transparency and is something that I think we need to move on. There have been some questions raised regarding appropriate spending in some publicly funded agencies, and the aim of this bill is to ensure that the measures of transparency and accountability continue.

ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT ACT (PROTECTION AGAINST SECURITY DEPOSITS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉLECTRICITÉ (PROTECTION CONTRE LES DÉPÔTS DE GARANTIE)

Mr. Crozier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 228, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to protect residential customers from hardships created by security deposits / Projet de loi 228, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité pour protéger les clients résidentiels contre les difficultés occasionnées par les dépôts de garantie.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The bill amends section 31 of the Electricity Act, 1998, to prohibit electricity distributors from shutting off the distribution of electricity to a residential property if the only overdue amount payable by the person receiving the electricity is in respect of a new security deposit or an increase to an existing security deposit, and the person was receiving electricity at the time the new security deposit or increase was demanded.

The bill also requires electricity distributors to provide notice of this prohibition.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Burlington do not want the McGuinty 13% sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services that they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Valerie.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to read in the following petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls and my colleague from St. Catharines.

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, petition the Parliament of Ontario to prevent the windup of Nortel pensions under current regulations administered by the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO). To be forced into annuities at this time is the worst possible outcome under current market conditions.

"Since Nortel fulfilled its responsibility under the pension benefits guarantee fund (PBGF), we are asking the province to honour its responsibility and protect Nortel pensions accordingly.

"We need our government fighting on our behalf in the bankruptcy court. We need change in provincial and federal laws which are unfair and outdated. They are in conflict with one another and allow failing companies like Nortel to deny pensions and benefits to pensioners, terminated and long-term disabled employees.

"Our government must convene a national summit on pensions and improve the Canada pension plan (CPP) benefits and make it mandatory. All provincial governments must take action now."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I continue to receive hundreds of these on a weekly basis.

"Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, hydro, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I support the petition. I sign it and send it down with Iman.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in support of proclaiming April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, film, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support" Mr. Ruprecht's and Mr. Colle's bill "proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

Of course I agree with this petition and am delighted to sign it.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a petition entitled "People of Ontario: Petition for Caledonia Public Inquiry." It's signed with well over 5,000 names, including Jennifer Stuart, and Ken Hewitt, who is in the gallery today.

The background for the petition is as follows:

"1. Commissioner Julian Fantino has proven through his own court testimony and published documentation that he is no longer unbiased or neutral. Along with native leaders having his personal cell number exclusively, he also uses his position to support them in court against charges by his own police force.

"2. Following the flawed results and recommendations of the Ipperwash Inquiry, the OPP and the command decisions made by the OPP have violated and ignored the rules and guidelines as set out by a number of statutes. These include the Criminal Code and the Ontario Police Services Act. In addition the OPP have violated or ignored their training and standard operating procedures. Thee is documented and electronic evidence that the OPP did so knowingly.

"3. The cost surrounding OPP is grossly underestimated. As taxpayers, we have a right to know the true costs of Caledonia. As the province of Ontario enters into years of deficits, how much more money will be wasted on flawed policing and the inability of leadership to change the tactics?

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"1. To request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the commissioner of the OPP, Julian Fantino, and impose his immediate suspension without pay and upon confirmation of the facts, his immediate resignation;

"2. To request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the OPP with respect to Caledonia" over the past three and a half years.

I affix my signature as per part 2 at the bottom.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have the petition from the people of the city of Greater Sudbury and the ridings of Nickel Belt and Sudbury, and it goes as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks' table with page Samuel.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

I support this petition, and I will affix my signature to it.

TAXATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as ... gas at the pumps; home heating oil and electricity; postage stamps; haircuts; dry cleaning; home renovations; veterinary care; arena ice and soccer field rentals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I've affixed my signature as I am in favour and giving it to page Valerie.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: "On August 10, 2008, there was a massive blast at Sunrise Propane" on Murray Road in Downsview. At the time of the explosion, the site was under the watch of the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, a delegated authority of the provincial government.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is a petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My apologies, Speaker. It is a petition that I am reading out.

"During the 1990s, administration of safety standards" related to fuel "was removed from" direct provincial ministry management and oversight by Premier Mike Harris and was delegated to the TSSA.

"Recent audit results" of the TSSA related to propane facilities across the province revealed that almost half the sites designated for inspection were no longer in operation and 30 sites were closed down due to "immediate hazards."

Following the Walkerton inquiry, Justice Dennis O'Connor expressed the need for "effective provincial government regulation and oversight as a key measure to reduce public health risk."

1530

"The TSSA's accountability has come into question" as the provincial Auditor General, in the December 2008 report, makes note that there has been inadequate "assurance that public safety and consumers were properly protected by the industry oversight organizations."

Therefore "we, the undersigned, urge the Legislature of Ontario to bring back the responsibilities of the TSSA under direct authority of the provincial government's Ministry of Small Business and Consumer Services.

"We believe that direct government administration and oversight of safety-related standards in the area of fuels is the most appropriate structure to ensure public safety."

I sign this petition, I support it and provide other supporting signatures. It will be brought by page Nicolas.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's submitted by the Islamic Society of North America, to whom I would like, on the occasion of this weekend, to bring Eid-ul-Adha Mubarak greetings. I also want to thank Aman Mir of Mississauga and Khalid Khokhar of Guelph for having collected the signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to

perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to support it and to ask page Vanessa to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a number of petitions from my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the new 13% HST was not part of Dalton McGuinty's election platform in 2007 and is in addition to the new, enormous health tax; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government will pay taxpayers, with their own tax dollars, a one-time so-called tax rebate during 2010;"—how convenient—"and

"Whereas condominium owners in the province of Ontario will pay at least 6% more in condo fees as a result of the new 13% HST and additional amounts to comply with the reserve fund requirement of section 93 of the Condominium Act;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government cancel its plan to introduce a new 13% tax on Canada Day, 2010, and abandon this tax grab" immediately "against condominium owners in the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased to present this to the page from the riding of Durham, Maggie.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is to stop the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers. It's addressed to you, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support" the bill called "the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign the petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The floor was with the member from Trinity–Spadina. We will move to the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I am delighted to speak about Bill 218. I have had an opportunity since June, when I was appointed by the Premier to be Ontario's Minister of Revenue, to do one thing: implement and communicate the largest tax reform in this province in over 40 years. I've had an opportunity to go right across the province of Ontario, and I want to share with you some of the things I have learned. I have been in Leamington, in your neck of the woods, Mr. Speaker; I've been to Fort Frances, to Ottawa and everywhere in between.

I always start my presentation by asking a few questions. I ask the good people whether they control the rate of exchange between our dollar and the US dollar. And they say, "No, John, we don't." I say, "Well, do you know what? The government doesn't control that either."

I say to people, "Do you control the price of energy and the price of oil? Are you in charge of that?" And they say, "No, it's not up to us." And I say, "Well, it's not up to the government either."

I say, "Well, how about how fast our good friends to the south get over this recession and come back stronger? Are you in charge of that?" They say, "No." And I say, "Well, it's not the government either."

Then I ask people a couple of questions: "Who generates wealth in this province? Is it government, or is it business?" And they say, "Well, it's business."

Government redistributes wealth; that is what we do on behalf of the good people of Ontario—setting rates of taxation, deciding how that money is spent—but we don't create wealth. At the moment, we can do what all

western governments are doing and borrow heavily to support the economy in the short term, but that's not a long-term solution.

I also ask the people, "Who is in charge of taxation and regulation in this province? Is it the private sector, or is it those of us who are elected?" And they say, "Well, that's your job, John, you and your colleagues in government, whatever the level of government. That's your fundamental role. That's what we elect you to do."

And then I ask a question I have asked dozens of times across the province: "When this recession, the biggest global recession since the 1930s, is over—and all recessions get over—do you think the economy will go back to the way it was, or do you think it's going to be different?" I say to people, "Hands up. Who thinks the economy is going to go back to the way it was?" Right across Ontario, not a single hand has been raised on that question.

But when I say, "Do you think the economy is going to be different?" every hand in the room has been raised everywhere I've been, and I would say I've given over three dozen presentations in the last 60 days. People have said the economy is going to be different. Then I say, "If we know the economy has changed—the world has changed—and we know instinctively that the world has changed, what kind of government would we be if our response to that was to do nothing—status quo—that we'd just hunker down and hope the economic storm blows over and nothing will change?"

On this side of the House we have been entrusted by the people to provide government, and government, by its nature, is to lead. That's why we've taken a bold but controversial decision to have the most comprehensive tax reform in this province in over 40 years.

We are doing a number of things. I say to the good people at home, they know that we are supporting the federal government as we move to one harmonized sales tax in the province of Ontario. Today we have two; we're going to have one on July 1, as long as this bill passes and another bill passes in the House of Commons.

Why are we doing that? Well, there are two sales taxes around, and of course I say to people, obviously one sales tax at one rate on one set of goods and services with one set of rules, one set of paperwork and one set of civil servants has got to be a lot less money for taxpayers, for government and for consumers than the system we have right now, which is two taxes at two different rates on two differing sets of goods and services with two different sets of paperwork and two different sets of regulations, going to two different governments with two different civil servants doing that work. That alone will save our government $100 million a year just by harmonizing our sales tax to one—one costs less than two—and it will save our business community some $500 million a year. I think that in itself is one reason for doing this.

But the nature of it is the difference between those two taxes.

1540

I've always said to people, "If something ain't broke, don't fix it," but the PST was brought in in 1961—I was two years old and I could barely say "PST," let alone spell it—and that's the system, that 20th-century taxation system, that our businesses have as a burden today as they try to compete in the 21st century for the jobs of the future. The nature of that tax versus the GST, the federal tax, is what we need to understand. Businesses understand when they charge the GST, they charge it and collect it and send it in to the government. I know our friends the farmers from TOGA are here, and they understand that if they charge the GST, they send it off to Jim Flaherty—what?—minus the GST they have paid on all their inputs. So it is a net tax.

But when it comes to the PST, this 1961 version of retail sales tax, people charge that PST, they send it to me—I'm the tax collector in chief for the province of Ontario—and do I give them a credit for all the PST they've paid on all of their inputs? No, and that is the problem. Because of the nature of that tax on tax, where is that money? It's buried in the price. There is no other place for it to be. So the dirty little secret of Ontario politics of 1961 is that people think they pay that PST today at 8%, and they're not paying 8%; they're paying more, because that tax on tax, that embedded tax, is buried in the price of the goods and services.

When 130 countries around the world and four of our sister provinces took this bold step, prices went down. That is something you may not hear from the other side of the House. I'm particularly proud, as the member for Perth–Wellington, an extremely productive agricultural riding, that we will finally give our farmers here in Ontario the same advantage enjoyed by the farmers of Quebec, so that they have the same advantage that has been provided by them when Quebec, in 1990, went to the Quebec sales tax, which in effect is the harmonized sales tax. The only difference is that they administer it as opposed to the federal government.

If we just stop there, I think an argument could be made, but we wouldn't get what we need in this province, which is more jobs. That's why we're going to take all of that money, because we will have a broader tax base, and we are permanently cutting income taxes for people and for business by over $15 billion over the next three years. The bill in front of this House is whether or not we should take that money and cut income taxes for people and for business by some $15 billion. On this side of the House we believe that's the right thing to do.

I just want to outline briefly what those tax credits are. We are eliminating three taxes in the province of Ontario. We're getting rid of the provincial sales tax. After July 1, it doesn't exist. We're eliminating the capital tax, a tax that's put on business whether they make money or not. I would consider that to be quite a regressive tax. As well, we're getting rid of the small business surtax, a tax that our small businesses pay. When they're really doing well, when they're really starting to add more people, we've been slapping a tax on there. We'll be the first province in Canada, in this great Dominion, to eliminate that small business surtax.

As well, we're lowering personal income taxes for 93% of Ontarians. We will have the lowest personal income tax rate on the first income tax bracket, some $37,000 a year, the lowest of any province in this great country. As well, we're lowering the small business corporate rate and we're lowering the large business corporate rate. The most important thing is that we're also doubling, more than doubling, the rebate for people of low income. I think of seniors on a fixed income and of middle-income families with a lot of children who currently get the GST rebate; they can expect to have more than that again from the provincial government on a permanent basis. As well, we're increasing the property tax credits. And for seniors, as a way of honouring those people who have contributed to our wonderful quality of life that we have here, we are doubling the seniors' tax credit by yet another $250. So I think on balance we have found a way of modernizing our tax system, taking that money and allowing our economy to grow.

We had Dr. Jack Mintz, formerly of the CD Howe Institute, the Palmer Chair in Public Policy at the University of Calgary, do a report, and this is what he says is the consequence of the tax reform that we are doing. He says that just by doing this, three things will happen: Real income in this province can rise by as much as 9%; there will be $47 billion more of investment in the province of Ontario. I come from Stratford, very near Woodstock. I know what a $1-billion investment by Toyota in Woodstock has meant to that community. There will be 47 more of those over the next 10 years; I'm for that. Particularly, we are looking at at 591,000 more jobs.

I'm going to be yielding the balance of my time shortly to my parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa Centre, but I want to say to people: We are faced with a huge economic challenge. Traditional people in this House would say that there are only two ways to deal with it: one, you could be like Mike Harris, who was ably assisted by Mr. Hudak at the time, and slash and burn the public services which families count on and seniors count on. The other way that we could do it is the way that the NDP government dealt with it: "We'll just borrow like there's no tomorrow and add it on to our grandchildren."

The problem we have today is that the rate of unemployment has nearly doubled, so what we have is fewer people putting into the common pot and we have more people drawing out. I'm proud to be part of a government that is supporting our people, but the way to solve that problem is to get people back to work. One, they want a job; two, they want the dignity of a job; three, they want to be able to look their children in the face and say that they have a job. They will gladly pay their taxes. It's why it's so important for us to build that base to get them back to work. That's what we need to do, and our plan is designed specifically to do that. It's why the bill is entitled "our tax reform plan to get people back to work and to create more jobs."

On our side of the House, it falls to us, from the good people of Ontario, to lead. We are going to lead. We have forged a historic partnership with the federal government and we are determined to move forward so that, effective on January 1, people will start to receive their permanent income tax cuts. I say to the members opposite: You really should decide that it's best to join us because I believe that this is the right thing to do. None of you have the intestinal fortitude to get up and say you're going to repeal it. So now is the time.

I'm looking forward to the vote. With that, I'm looking forward to hearing the remarks from my parliamentary assistant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's my great opportunity to follow the minister and talk about this tax reform package. We have heard a lot of one-sided conversation from the opposition benches on this very important issue. I always likened this to watching a play. This is a play with three acts. You have to watch all three acts to understand the full story. You can't just pick and choose act one or act two and be able to understand what the whole story is.

What is act one? Act one, as the minister talked about, is about the harmonization of the GST and PST and the important notion that we ensure that the PST become a value-added tax so that our businesses can input tax credits so they can reduce their cost of production so they can be more competitive globally.

I think we have to recognize that that, if anything, is what this recession has shown us: that we live in a very globalized economy. Our competition no longer is with British Columbia, Alberta or Quebec. In fact, I will argue that our competition is not even with the United States of America, because we live in a fairly integrated market. We are competing for the American consumers. Who are we competing against? We are competing with countries like China, Russia, India and Brazil. We need to make sure that our manufacturers and our businesses right here in Ontario are competitive enough to compete against those countries for that American consumer market. But that's act one.

The second act is that we are bringing extensive cuts in personal income taxes. What the opposition benches are essentially saying is that low- and middle-income Ontarians should not get a tax cut. That's their position and it's shameful that that's what they want. They don't want low- and middle-income Ontarians—the good, hard-working people in my riding of Ottawa Centre who deserve a 16.5% income tax cut—the opposition is against that. That's why they don't come out and talk about it. The tax cut which we have proposed will create the lowest income tax rate on the first $37,000 anywhere in Canada, which means that 93% of Ontario's taxpayers are going to get a tax cut; it means that 90,000 more Ontarians—and these are low-income Ontarians—will no longer be paying taxes. That is significant. I think all of us in this Legislature should be supporting that motion.

1550

We are talking about cutting taxes for our seniors who live on fixed incomes. Do you know what? The kind of

fearmongering that's going on with seniors is becoming quite ridiculous. This plan is to ensure that our seniors are taken care of. This plan is to ensure that our businesses are doing well, because when they do well, they pay corporate taxes. When they are doing well, they hire more people who pay taxes.

What do we do with the revenues? We invest in our public health system to help our seniors and make sure they have quality care in this province. We make sure we are paying for our public education system so that our kids have the foundation necessary to build a strong economy.

That's why act three is very important: We are cutting corporate taxes. We are particularly helping our small businesses, which are the lifeline of our economy here in Ontario. In every single community in every single one of our ridings, we are making sure that our small businesses see a reduction in their corporate taxes by 18%. When I tell small businesses and retailers that their small business corporate tax rate will go down by 18%, they can't believe it. They're very happy and excited that this government is taking that step.

What is the opposition's plan? They don't want that tax cut to be extended to our small businesses. That, honestly, is shameful. That is playing games with the very hard working people in our communities who will see a significant gain because of these cuts in small business corporate income taxes, not to mention elimination of the small business deduction surtax and other corporate tax cuts.

All in all, this is a plan to cut taxes and create new jobs. In this economic recession, in this significant downturn, we need to make sure that our businesses continue to grow. We need to make sure that, as this recession comes to an end, our businesses are ready to pick up the baton and run and succeed in this global marketplace, because that is where our future lies. For that to happen, we need to ensure that there is a competitive tax structure in this great province of ours.

What is bothersome to me is that the opposition is very quick to criticize one aspect of this plan, not all three; they don't talk about the personal income tax cuts and the cuts in corporate taxes. They're quick to criticize one aspect, but there is a vacuum of any ideas from the opposition parties. They have not taken the time to tell us how they plan to move this economy forward, how they plan that Ontario will move forward as this recession ends. It is very easy to criticize, but it's difficult to take a bold leadership move like the McGuinty government is taking in this instance. This is a very well thought out plan. This plan is to ensure that we continue to grow our economy.

I have a couple of minutes left, and I want to quickly talk about some of the concerns about the harmonized sales tax. First of all, we need to tell—I tell my constituents all the time that we are already paying 13% on 83% of our consumer spending: 5% GST and 8% PST; there is no change. The change that will take place is on 17% of our consumer spending where we are only paying 5% and we'll see an additional 8%. That means what? That means an extra $2.5 billion or so in the provincial treasury.

What are we doing with that? We're shifting all that surplus and giving it back to Ontarians through a personal income tax cut. Now, if we were not cutting personal income taxes, perhaps some of the criticism may have been valid, but that is not the case. We are bringing a very significant cut in personal income taxes, which directly helps low- and middle-income Ontarians and seniors in our ridings who are on fixed incomes, not to mention that we are bringing a permanent Ontario sales tax credit up to $260 per adult and child. Those who are listening at home will recognize that because it's similar to the GST credit, which is up to $160 per adult and child. We are also enhancing property tax credits, in particular for seniors, to make sure they continue to live in their own homes.

This is a concrete plan. This is a very well thought out plan. It is a plan that is deserving of support by everyone in this Legislature. If they don't support it, let's hear what their ideas are to ensure that there are jobs being created in this great province of ours. What I hear from the other side is silence, a vacuum.

Again, in the response you'll probably hear them all talking about the HST side of things, which will create almost 600,000 jobs over the next 10 years in this province of ours, but not talking about cutting personal income taxes for low- and middle-income people and seniors in our community.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to start fairly quickly by saying that we didn't say there weren't good items in this bill with respect to being more competitive. Let's be clear on that. I think we also have to be clear on this: There's only one reason they're changing the tax rules, and that is to increase revenue. You can talk about all the shifting and changes—it's to increase the money in the government's pocket. That's what it's about. You can argue it until the cows come home.

I'll give you one example, and I'd like the minister to respond to this. If you spend $100 a week on gas, commuting or whatever you're doing, now you'll be paying $8 more each week, and that's $416 a year on that one item. I could say the same thing for heating your home and almost all of the other services that people use. Whether it's physical fitness or registering your kids in sports, it's going to cost the consumer more. In fact, every decision they make will cost 8% more. Whether it's getting your taxes done or buying RSPs, capital stock or groceries, you'll be spending 8% more. So it's about getting more money.

I listened to CBC Radio this morning—I think the minister should look it up—and I believe that Andy Barrie asked you a very fair question. He asked you why you weren't having public hearings. I didn't hear an answer, as I haven't heard an answer to why Premier McGuinty won't have public hearings. What have they

got to hide? What do they not want to hear from the people of Ontario? I would ask you out of courtesy to the people of Ontario to answer in your two-minute summation the question that I'm being asked wherever I go: "Why won't they have public hearings?" It's such a simple request. The dust would settle, and we'd get more people to understand what it is you're hiding.

I'll tell you why. Most of the provisions are income-tested on the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is a classic, watching these statements in the House. They start off by saying, "Oh, we're going to cut personal income tax"—wonderful—"and we're going to give them three instalments of $334 in the next two years. We're going to give them back a whole whopping $900." I believe they mentioned that some of the people in the lower income bracket would save anywhere from $200 to $500 a year. Wow, that's a lot of money.

They're talking about 600,000 jobs. Well, isn't this interesting? I've heard this number to the point where I'm feeling ill about it. They're going to create 600,000 jobs. I'll tell you what: I'll be sitting here a year from now and I want you, who keep talking about 600,000 jobs, to come and tell me the totals, because right now, Minister, there are 20,000 people in Hamilton out of work—320,000 jobs. And you think that by giving corporations money, they're going to pass it on to the consumer? You're dreaming. They're never going to pass it on to the consumer. It's not going to create work, but I'll tell you what will create work. If you had done our 10% manufacturing rebate tax, if you had Buy Ontario, and if you had 50% content on Ontario building things, which we suggested and which was ignored, that might help. If you think you're going to pay a welder 50 cents in Mexico or China, and they're going to pass on the savings to us, when you're paying a welder $20 and something an hour here, don't you think those businesses are going to continue to move where they can make more profit for their shareholders and pay less to the people who work here?

If you don't think that, you're living on a different planet, because that's what has been going on in our economy for the last 10 years. It's the erosion of our base industries. Our base industries are leaving Canada and they're going south and going overseas. That's why we can't compete, and you're giving them more money to open more plants in other countries. You're not doing anything to help Ontario. Trust me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to have just a couple of minutes to thank and commend the Minister of Revenue and the member from Ottawa Centre for their comments and speech with respect to Bill 218. They had 20 minutes allocated to them and they used that in this place for the purpose of debate so that the public, as well as those of us here, can hear what the debate's about.

As a matter of fact, the minister and I shared an hour. He led it off and I finished it, as his parliamentary assistant, and we used our entire hour for debate in this place to put forward our views in respect to this bill, including the HST.

1600

I can commend the member from Trinity–Spadina as well. He took 20 minutes yesterday, as the NDP wait for their leadoff hour by the member from Beaches–East York, and I would anticipate and hope that the member from Beaches–East York uses his entire hour within the time that's allocated.

Having said that, the official opposition had an hour leadoff. They shared that between two members, but during that time they rang the bell for two hours. For two hours they rang the bells: one hour of debate, two hours of dead time, dead air, wasted time in which members of this Legislature could have spent the time debating the matter here in this House and had exactly the type of hearings that we're talking about. This is what this place is about. But they wasted two hours of time here in this place because they couldn't get on with the hour they had allocated to them.

I hope, as the rotation moves around from the minister and the members and their speeches to the official opposition, that they'll spend the 20 minutes they have in this rotation for speaking and not for ringing the bells and wasting maybe another hour. Hopefully, when we get to the opposition, I'm confident that Mr. Prue, as the critic, will use his time wisely—provide us with his insights, as he always does; challenge the government, and that's his responsibility—and we will have a chance to respond accordingly.

I look forward to this debate continuing. I hope that we use the time we have available wisely in this place and not to have dead air.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I did get a haircut about an hour ago, and I'm still trying to—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: We noticed.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

This is a very serious piece of legislation, and it's one on which we, on this side, have made our stand very clear. It's well known that we oppose the implementation of the harmonized sales tax. It's also very clear that we stand united with our colleagues in the New Democratic Party to call for public hearings into the HST.

My colleague from Durham knows this bill inside out. We've had many conversations about the impact of the HST, what it will mean to his constituents and what it will mean, quite frankly, to his own municipality. They think, with Chair Roger Martin—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Anderson.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Chair Roger Anderson, I apologize—that this HST will cost $7 million to their municipality. I think this is a real challenge that they're going to

face. I see some people shaking their heads on the other side, but the reality is that right now municipalities have the 100% rebate for the GST. Once the HST is implemented, there's going to be a 78% rebate, not 100%. What municipalities have to do is look at their invoices. They have to look at the contracts. They have to look at what they've paid out and what they've paid in PST and look at the difference of what that 78% will mean. In this case, in Durham, they've done that study, and it's $7 million. That's a concern for us.

We're also seriously concerned about what the impacts of the HST will be on the medical community. We all know, for example, that medical supplies, their rents, their journals—and the rents, by extension of their hydro, heat and maintenance fees, are going to be included, and that is a serious concern. We don't know, after asking the ministry officials at finance, whether or not this is going to have an impact on the medical community. They said that they didn't know. You can't bring in a $3-billion tax increase, you can't change the taxes, without understanding where the money is going to go in the health care system, because, quite honestly, that's where we're spending our money.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister of Revenue, you have two minutes to respond.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleagues and friends, the members from Durham, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Pickering–Scarborough East and Nepean–Carleton, for joining in the debate. I agree with my colleague on the government bench that it's good that we're actually talking about this and that we're not just ringing bells and having dead air around here. I agree with you. We need to have this debate.

I say to the member from Durham, and I'd say to the good people of Ontario: You may recall that the member from Durham said there would be 8% more on groceries. Did you hear him say that? Because I know that Hansard will show that he said that. There is no PST and there is no GST when you buy basic groceries. It hasn't been the case in Ontario ever, and I assure you that there will be no HST on groceries. But it's exactly that type of loose way with the facts that actually is scaring people, because the statements are being overstated about the impact of this tax.

I agree with the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek that the manufacturing sector has been hit hard in this province. Our future is with advanced manufacturing. I know the good things that are going on in Hamilton. I remember, when I was the Minister of Research and Innovation, the funding that went into Innovation Park. These are creating the new jobs of the 21st century for our children. Those are wise investments. But in an advanced society, where we're adding value, we cannot afford to tax that value more than once. That is what the HST allows us to do by using the GST rules. That ensures that we are not taxing value more than once. That's what our competitors don't do; it's something that we also must resist.

I would say to my friend from Nepean–Carleton that when it comes to municipalities, it's very simple. With the 5% of the HST collected by the federal government, they are still going to receive their rebate, but when the 8% comes through, I can assure you that there will be 78%. In other provinces that have the HST, the rebate on the provincial portion of the HST is either zero or 50%. Here in Ontario, it will be 78% to ensure that municipalities are made whole.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate. It's interesting that when this government talks about cutting taxes—they stood against cutting taxes since before they were elected, and once they were elected in 2003, they hoisted the biggest tax increase in Ontario's history into their first budget. It's hard to square where they come across when they talk about cutting taxes.

Now they talk about permanent tax cuts. Who out there really believes it when Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government say, "We're cutting your taxes permanently"? Based on the record since 2003, we all know that a Dalton McGuinty promise has a shorter shelf life than whole milk. It just doesn't last. The first time that he's faced with the choice of either raising taxes or facing tough decisions as a government that they have never been able to make, he raises your taxes, because that's the easiest route for him. He's like water: He takes the path of least resistance and he raises your taxes because he believes, at the end of the day, that the consumers out there will simply pay it and suck it up.

When this government talks about the economic effect of this tax and they talk about this tax being part of Ontario's recovery, anybody who has studied any history of recessions at all knows that what drives economies out of recessions is consumer demand and consumer spending. What could you do to dampen consumer demand more than to hoist a consumption tax on the very people you're depending on to bring your economy out of recession? That is historically what has happened: Consumer spending drives the economy back up out of recession. We're going to have a reluctance from consumers to spend, some because they will be protesting the fact that they're paying 8% more for all of those goods and services that they use every day—some of them absolutely essential—and some of them will cut their spending because there's nothing left.

The Minister of Revenue talks about, "Let's talk about this. Let's talk this out. We're here to debate." Now that you can't get this channel on satellite television anywhere in the province of Ontario, you have to ask yourself who actually is watching the debate. I don't see anybody in here. Even my fan club didn't show up today—and it's getting small, too, I know. But the reality is that if you want to get out to debate this issue, the best way to do it is to take it to the people. Why wouldn't you, as a government that wants to proceed with one of the biggest, most sweeping changes in Ontario taxation history, do what the public is simply asking you to do and what we, as the people's messengers, the loyal

opposition, and our friends in the New Democratic Party are asking for on the people's behalf: call public hearings?

You want to find out? You want to talk this out? We'll be at the hearings. I know that all of the people who are interested in this bill—and there are millions out there—will be at the hearings as well.

1610

The minister talks about the 591,000 jobs that they expect to be created as a result of this DST or HST or whatever you want to call it.

Interjection: BST.

Mr. John Yakabuski: BST; whatever you want to call it. But the minister cites a report that was done by Jack Mintz. No one is going to question Jack Mintz's credibility as a forecaster and an economist on these issues. But Jack Mintz is also a businessman. He doesn't do these things out of the goodness of his heart because he wants to save the world or he thinks that all of his services should be provided free of charge because he has something to offer to the people. He takes contracts just like all other lawyers or economists or forecasters or whatever.

They would have done a study before they ever brought this issue to the House, before they ever spoke about this at the time of the budget in March, and said, "We've got this study that supports a blended sales tax or harmonized sales tax"—no, no; no such study. Now, when their backs are against the wall because seniors and those people who are going to be hurt most because of this tax are rebelling and revolting across the province, they say, "Listen, Jack, we've got a little bit of money available here in the budget to pay for some studies."

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes: "These are the answers we need. Let's get all of that empirical data and anecdotal data that you can find, but at the end of the day we need a conclusion that supports what we've already decided we're doing." Jack Mintz would say, "Do you know what? I think we can do that. How much did you say you had? Yes, I think we can do that. I think we can give you just exactly what you wanted," because you know the old saying that he who pays the piper gets to pick the tune? That's exactly what would have happened with Mr. Mintz. I'm not questioning his credentials or his credibility in any way, but I also know that if I'm working for someone, I'm going to try to please the person whom I'm working for.

The government goes on and on and talks about those kinds of things, and all we've ever asked for is to take this issue to the people. They ask us what we're going to do. We're more than prepared—I'll tell you, if the Premier and the finance minister and the Minister of Revenue want to say today, "We're staying the proceedings. We're going to just put this into limbo. We're going to say 'wait,' and we'll go to the people; we'll go to the polls, we'll fight an election on the issue," we would be glad—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: We will.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My friend Lou from Northumberland–Quinte West says, "We will." You'll do it 14 months after it's already law and you've signed an agreement and taken a poison pill that prevents anybody in the future from (a) changing the rates for two years or (b) getting out of the agreement for five years without cutting a cheque for $4.3 billion. Where in the name of Sam Hill, after you've driven this province into a $25-billion deficit, are you going to get $4.3 billion to cut a cheque to the federal government? It's just not going to happen; you know that.

So I'm saying to my friend Lou: Stay the proceedings. Say, "We're not going any further; we're not proceeding. We're going to go to the people on this. We'll fight an election on the issue," and we'll be glad to join you. We'll be glad to join you, only we'll be on the opposite side.

Interjection: Why don't we have an election?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd be glad to have that. I think the people would be glad to have an election on this issue. And then we'd see what they really like.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd love to debate this for the next five months. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East wants to debate the issue, yet they limit us to 6.5 hours of debate in this House and then they'll have time allocation on the bill. After that, they'll time-allocate the committee hearings to be held only in Toronto, shortened, and then they'll time-allocate third reading. They don't really want to talk about this. They just want it to be over with.

But because they've taken all the arrows out of our quiver, we have no tools left in the toolbox, so to speak, to register our disgust and our sadness that a government would do this to the seniors, the golden generation in this province, Canada's greatest generation, those veterans of World War II, that generation, who are still here today, fighting and clawing and trying to keep their heads above water. That's the generation that this government is attacking. They're saying, "You know what? We don't care that you won't be able to pay your hydro bills anymore. We don't care that you can't put gas in the car. We don't care that the heating of your home is going to be out of reach. We're going to hammer you, because we have a different idea and we want to make sure that our agenda is the one that matters."

With those kinds of situations and these kinds of untenable circumstances, rendering us almost unable to properly debate the issue because it will go no further than these hallowed halls of Queen's Park, we want hearings to be in Pembroke, Arnprior, Sault Ste. Marie, Dryden, North Bay, Sarnia, Durham and Cambridge. We want them everywhere, and we'll throw in Parry Sound, if Norm would like it. But they're not going to have any hearings there.

With that being left as the only options we have—you've taken everything out of our option—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Here we go—another 30 minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I want you to get prepared. I want you to get prepared, Wayne. If you want to put the cotton batting in your ears, you go right ahead.

I'm sorry, but you leave me no option, Mr. Speaker. It's not you personally, but it is your government that leaves me no option but to move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1617 to 1647.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 36.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Ask them one more time for public hearings.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Actually, I agree with my whip, and I appreciate the prompting. Sometimes it's prodding; in this case it's prompting me to ask, before you all leave—don't go, because maybe I can get you to agree right now, one last time, to public hearings. That's what the people of Ontario want. That's what the loyal opposition has been fighting for, fighting tooth and nail to bring this issue to the people.

The Minister of Revenue was talking about how there's going to be an additional $250 rebate or lowering of the taxes to seniors. When I talk to seniors in my riding about what kind of a hit they're going to take with the GST, it adds up to more like $2,500. Let's just say that you're a couple that is retired. You've got a golf membership at the Whitetail in Eganville or Renfrew or Wolf Ridge in Killaloe. A couple is about $1,500. Add your taxes on that, my friend, and then start adding 8% every time you fill that car. We live in rural Ontario.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Oh, Yak.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have all the respect in the world for my friend from Etobicoke Centre, but in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—and she has been there; the Minister of Natural Resources has been there. She knows what a vast tract of land we live on. You can't get into that car for a short drive, and you sure as heck can't get on the subway, so every time you fill that car, it's an additional 8%.

You've got to start thinking. I see the minister responsible for seniors. I think she's weakening. I think she's starting to wonder. She is starting to question whether or not she is fulfilling her mandate to those people who have given so much to this country. She's starting to ask herself, as the minister responsible for seniors, "Can I sit back? Can I sit back and be silent on this?"

It is time. It is time for the minister responsible for seniors to stand up, face her cabinet colleagues down and say, "You know what? You're wrong. We can't do this. What about those people? What about those people who are living on fixed incomes?" As my friend from Leeds–Grenville—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, now the member from Algoma–Manitoulin laughs because they might have a golf membership. Are they not supposed to enjoy the fruits of their labour if they worked hard all their lives? Does it mean that now they shouldn't be able to afford to do some of the things they want to do? Maybe they've got children and grandchildren who could still use a little bit of help. You're hurting those people. It leaves the grandchildren—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The grandchildren have jobs.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He says the grandchildren have jobs. Well, I'll tell you, 300-and-some thousand of those grandchildren lost their jobs in your Ontario, lost their jobs under your management, so there are a lot fewer of those grandchildren working.

You have to ask yourself about all of the ramifications, all of the effect of what you're doing and the decisions you're making.

I'm going to ask you: Don't let your leader lead—I know that's redundant—lead you down the garden path on this one. Don't go like lemmings over the cliff and just do as he does. Stand up. Stand up for seniors.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Stand up for children and youth. Stand up for those in community services who need our help.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Tourism, stand up for tourist operators in the province of Ontario. They need our help. They don't need to have this foisted upon them at a time when they can least afford it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think you've riled somebody up, so I'm going to give them a chance to calm down.

Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I'm doing my best not to rile anyone up. That is not why I'm here. But this is an impassioned call to arms, a call to action, to stand up for the people of Ontario.

Every one of you people, in your ridings, somebody sent you here. Those people who voted for you in Algoma–Manitoulin or Barrie or Ottawa–Vanier or—

Interjection: Huron–Bruce, Huron–Bruce.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —Huron–Bruce, they sent you here to represent them. They gave you a mandate and you

should be proud to serve them, and I know you are. But I'm asking you to stand up for those people now.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. Member for Huron–Bruce.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't take your orders from Dalton McGuinty and his special interests. Don't listen to them. This is an opportunity for you to stand up for the people who sent you here, the constituents. That's who our loyalties must remain with: our constituents, who vote us here time and time again.

I can tell you, the only people who elect me or can unelect me are the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. My loyalties remain, and will always remain, with them.

I will stand with the seniors, I will stand with the families, I will stand with the young hockey players and the soccer moms and I will vote against this bill.

What you have left me are no tools but to ask for adjournment of this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I take it that as opposed to asking for it, you've moved adjournment of the House?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1655 to 1725.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, take your seats, please.

Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 8; the nays are 36.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

I want to advise the House of some good news for me. The three late shows previously scheduled for this evening have been withdrawn.

Further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I only have a minute left, and in the interests of trying to get people home a little earlier, we decided to withdraw those late shows and reserve the option of filing them on other questions at a later date.

But as I said earlier, I predicted this would happen. I predicted it, and recently we just saw that the government House leader has filed a time allocation motion on the debate on this bill.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Isn't that a surprise?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I'm not surprised because your record precedes you, Mr. Brown. This is the way that this government works: "Shut down debate; shut it down. We don't want to hear from people. We know best. This is the Liberal Party, the Liberal government. We know everything." I cannot tell you how sad and disappointed I am that on the biggest piece of tax legislation that we've ever seen, the government has shut down debate. Shame on you. You'll have to answer to your constituents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and comment on the speech from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He was talking about democracy and debate. In the meantime, within the 20 minutes, he shut the debate down for almost an hour. I guess to the people of Ontario who were listening and watching today, the opposition party was playing games. They don't want to cut taxes for 93% of Ontarians. They don't want to cut business tax. They don't want to help to create more than 600,000 jobs for Ontarians.

I listened to him about his arguments. It didn't make sense at all. He's asking us to open the debate. We had the debate in this place. It's the right place to debate any issues concerning the people of Ontario. Especially today, we've been debating the most important issue concerning the future of this province, concerning the future of our kids, concerning the future of our environment, infrastructure, education and health care.

The opposition party is playing games with the people of Ontario. They go and say, "We oppose this HST tax or tax reform." In the meantime, when the opposition leader was in London, I asked him, "If you get elected as Premier of this province, what would you do?" And you know what? He said nothing. He would never commit to repeal the transformation taxes in this province of Ontario.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's Mr. Hudak you're talking about, right?

1730

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Yes, I'm talking about the opposition leader, Mr. Tim Hudak.

The most important thing is, this place is open for debate any time. They had the chance, and they shut down the debate twice this afternoon—twice this afternoon. It's not fair to the people of Ontario. It's not fair to the people who were listening to us, who elect us to come to this place and debate the most important issues. The member opposite, he claims he wants to talk to the people of Ontario. He had that chance, and he blew it. He blew it. The opposition party, all the time they have the chance, and what happens? They leave the House. They leave and go outside. They forget this is a place of the people. This place is open for debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke tried to convince the members to have a second look at this. It's the biggest tax grab in the

history of Ontario, a fundamental change to tax policy, and they refuse to have public hearings.

Now we have the time allocation motion, which is even sadder. What it does—and I can read it, quoting it here, "On Monday, December 7, 2009, those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved"—they won't even hear the amendments; they're just deemed to be moved—"and the chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining" issues. The only reason they're having these hearings is to move amendments because of shoddy drafting, probably, but there's no room for input here.

I think we should leave with one thought in mind: We've tried everything we can to this point to bring a voice to the people of Ontario who have not been heard. What I can say to the people of Ontario is this: If you're purchasing anything that amounts to $100 a month, that will be 8% more on those purchases. Let's take gas, as an example. If it's $100 a week, that would be $416 a year on that one item. That's not including Internet service, home heating oil, consultants, buying stocks, trading your RRSPs. This tax is going to hurt consumers at every level. No matter how you cut it, this is a policy shift that's not going to tax income from stocks or wages or payroll; it's going to tax everything you consume. It's a consumer tax. I think it's blatantly unfair for those on fixed incomes.

They have now determined that they're not going to listen to anyone. Shame on the Premier for not having public hearings. I just think it's completely unconscionable to have done this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's regrettable that we get to these points in debate where the government decides to dig in their heels and go in one particular direction without giving an opportunity for process, both for the opposition and the public to be able to speak to this.

I said earlier, in another debate, that this is a key plank of what this government is going to be running on in the next election. I think it's a plank that you're probably going to walk off the edge of, but that's a whole other story. The government has clearly set this out as being the key thing you're going do in this Parliament, and in the next election, it's going to be one of the key things that you're going to have to defend.

The government goes out of its way—the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Revenue and others—to get up in this House and say, "We're doing the right thing. We're proud. This is the right thing to do. All these people are behind us. You guys are just making all this up." I say to you: Allow this thing to go to committee; allow the public to have their say. It's a little thing called democracy that we gained some years ago as a result of the Magna Carta and a whole bunch of other things that happened since that time.

At the end of the day, the public should have an opportunity to have its say. You'll get a chance to organize people to come to committee to say all kinds of wonderful things, I'm sure. You'll be able to find relatives and other people, party faithful, to come over and talk about this bill. I know how that works; I was on the other side. But I've got to say, it will also give opportunity for those who are really concerned to have their say. What's wrong with that? It's called democracy. It gives them an opportunity.

We have made an offer to you. We have said we are prepared to allow you to sit until midnights without any debate on midnight sitting. We'd give it to you on unanimous consent, provided that you allow us to have some committee hearings in a number of communities. We're not saying a gazillion; we're saying Thunder Bay, Sudbury, London, Toronto—

Mr. Michael Prue: And Ottawa.

Mr. Gilles Bisson:—and Ottawa. That is not, in my view, an exorbitant or irresponsible approach on the part of the New Democratic Party. We're trying to find a way to give the public their say and to do what it is our job in this place to do. I just find it sad that the government decides to do otherwise.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I was listening to a couple of the comments today. I heard them last week, last Thursday, and there really is some misinformation that is being distributed.

I'll give you an example. The member from Durham last week said, and I quote out of Hansard, "Tell the people of Ontario the truth, Minister: that this is an 8% increase in the cost of living." Now, that is patently absurd. Today he used exactly the same argument, and he said, "If you spend $100, it's going to cost you 8% more." That is not true. Some 83% of all the items that attract sales tax are not impacted by this at all. There's only 17%, and there are offsets on the other side. What we have is the constant putting forward of information that is totally incorrect. And what he's trying to say is that there's going to be an 8% cost-of-living rise as a result of this particular initiative.

Interjection: Check it out.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: The member is saying, "Check it out." I would respectfully submit that you should check it out and you should be saying something that can be actually validated. What you're saying is absolutely not able to be validated, because only 17% of items that are currently not attracting a sales tax will be included.

Why don't you just get to the point? If you're so anxious to be able to convey this information to the general public, you have that opportunity right here in the House, but let's make sure that there is, in fact, accuracy in your statements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate, this debate will be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise. Government House leader?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The debate can continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I am absolutely proud to contribute to this debate. I would like to thank the government House leader. I know that this is a very difficult time for her and for others in this House, but I have been waiting now patiently for days and days for an opportunity to give the leadoff speech for the New Democratic Party—for that very opportunity. I know that my colleague Rosario Marchese had an opportunity to stand up and speak for 20 minutes, but it was literally impossible for me to be here. I have about 40 minutes in total that has been agreed to. I am going to split my time with my colleague the leader of the NDP, Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton Centre.

I hope to bring some civility to the debate. I'm not going to be ringing any bells. I want to talk about the bill. I want to talk about why I am opposed to the bill, why I think the government is not making the right decision on the bill, and what we need to do—I'm being waved the time allocation bill—but with the greatest of respect, when bells are rung constantly so that the third party cannot do its leadoff speech, that is not very democratic either.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry, you could have done your leadoff speech yesterday, but you went to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's not a point of order.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is also pretty rude because, as the member knows, I had been requested for months to speak to that reception.

What is happening, in the whole midst of the economy of this province, is that 200,000 people have lost their jobs in the last year. We have to look at the context of what is happening here economically and in terms of this bill. How is this going to be remedied? I look to some of the experts, and we all look to some of the experts, in terms of what is going to happen in terms of the HST.

The first expertise that came along was the chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce was very detailed, and although the government was not very pleased in the details and they like to cart around that the chamber of commerce was somehow supportive, the chamber of commerce was very detailed in what they had to say. They said that there were going to be up to 40,000 jobs lost as a result of the HST. And they went further than Jack Mintz, further than anyone else who has been paid by this government; they detailed how that was going to happen. They detailed that there would be 3,300 fewer jobs in construction. They detailed that there would be 9,800 fewer professional jobs. They detailed that there would be 9,800 fewer professional jobs. They detailed that there would be 3,500 fewer accommodation and food service jobs, and finally, that there would be 4,600 fewer manufacturing jobs.

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If anyone took the time to detail and look at this, it was the chamber of commerce. Surprisingly, one of the authors of the chamber of commerce report was that very same Jack Mintz, and I'm going to deal with him in a minute because it seems to me rather strange that an economist can give one set of details one week and turn around, after he is paid to give another set of details, and do something else.

The government, when they didn't like the report from the chamber of commerce, which was co-authored or partially authored by Jack Mintz, went out and hired him directly. We all know what happens if you hire someone to give you an opinion you want to hear. It's like someone who's involved in a traffic ticket. The first lawyer he or she goes to says, "I'm afraid you're going to have to plead guilty because you've done all these wrong things." Hell, you don't want that lawyer; you want a different lawyer. So you go out and find one who says, "I'll defend you on this charge. Notwithstanding all these things, I'm willing to argue something else." So that's the lawyer you hire.

Nothing is any different with this government. They went out and paid for a consultant, an economist who would give them a different opinion even though the different opinion was, in part, against himself. They went out and got Dr. Mintz to tell them that they're going to create 600,000 jobs in a period of 10 years—the same guy who said they're going to lose 40,000 jobs. Same guy. So I have to ask: How could anyone believe that? He didn't detail a single thing that's going to happen. He didn't say, "These are going to be the construction jobs. These are going to be the service jobs. These are going to be the jobs in government." He didn't list any of them. He just has this airy-fairy thought that there are going to be 600,000 jobs, and I'll tell you, not one single economist who peer-reviewed him believes it. Everybody thinks it's a whole, giant joke, and I have to tell you, I consider it a whole giant joke. I could say that by not doing it, you're going to make a million jobs. What difference is me saying that and him saying that? It's ethereal. It is absolutely pulled out of the air. That's what "ethereal" means: pulled right out of the air.

This is the same Alberta academic that the government dissed in this House. I remember when the finance minister stood up and he was asked about Dr. Jack Mintz. He used the following words: nothing but an "Alberta academic" whose "neo-conservative ideas" simply "don't work." The same finance minister who stands up today and lauds the paid report—you pay for it, you get it, and all of a sudden the guy who didn't know what he was talking about is your hero, and there's the same Jack Mintz. I guess, when it's convenient, the finance minister is willing to embrace the old ideas of the Alberta academic whose ideas just don't work. Because they work for the finance minister, they're part of the argument he now wants to make, but nobody in this province believes those numbers except some members opposite.

Nobody believes the numbers at all. After all, who believes that an 8% tax on gas and hydro is going to create jobs? You have to drive farther to work. When you get some tomatoes out of Leamington, it costs 8% more

to drive them up to Toronto, where you buy them in the supermarket. The hydro that powers all of our factories is going to cost 8% more, but all the costs are going to go down. Everybody is going to live in some kind of giant utopia. Nobody believes this. Nobody at all.

Who believes the Alberta academic who, one year ago, wrote a paper that predicted the HST will kill tens of thousands of jobs every year and now says that it's going to create 600,000 jobs in their place? I don't know how much this government paid him, but I'll bet you it was a lot of money. I'll bet you that it was more money than I can possibly imagine or probably am going to earn in a year, for him to make those kinds of statements. One day I hope to find out exactly how much this government paid Professor Dr. Jack Mintz to go in a 180-degree circle, from it costing 40,000 jobs to the hugely inflated figure that it's going to create 600,000. He came to that whole thing in just the shortest possible time. In fact, I think that it's not going to happen at all.

Then I looked at the HST and I thought, "Why is the government doing it?" There's a lot of—

Mr. John O'Toole: More revenue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, here's my friend, and he just anticipated. Lots of people think it's going to create more revenue. I will tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is going to bring revenue in. Ordinary consumers are going to pay $3.8 billion more to this government. They're going to pay it on everything they buy, from gas to oil to lawyers' fees, professional fees. On everything that was not taxed before, they're going to pay it.

But the government, at the same time—and you will all admit it, because I hear the Minister of Revenue, the Minister of Finance, the Premier and the members opposite—my good friend the parliamentary assistant stands up all the time and says, "We're going to cut taxes to the big corporations. They're going to save $4.3 billion by what we do."

Remember those two numbers: $3.8 billion that it will cost the consumers, and $4.3 billion that's going to go to the corporations. The government's actually going to lose money. It's going to lose money on this deal so that ordinary consumers, the people watching this television—you have to know they're going to take it off you, but they're going to give it to someone else. They're going to take it off you and they're going to actually lose money so that when you ask them about all the programs that need to be done, they're going to say that they don't have any money to do it.

In fact, the tax package is going to cost about half a billion dollars to this government. They're bringing in a scheme that's going to cost them, in the long term, a lot of money: less money for critical health services, less money for education, less money for the elderly, less money for long-term-care facilities. At the same time, all of those companies are going to look in there and say, "This is good."

I hear the government saying that, oh, my God, they're going to create jobs. I don't think so. I watch the United States. I've watched them for the last 20 years. I've watched them under George Bush. I've watched them go through machinations. I've watched them being given trillions of dollars in tax cuts. Can anyone say that that country is any better off, with the trillions of dollars of tax cuts—which are being mirrored by this government—than they were before? I think not. Can anyone say that jobs have been created? Look at the unemployment lines in the United States; look at the unemployment lines here. There are absolutely no jobs being created as a result of this kind of thing.

Profitable companies that are going to get this tax—remember, it's only the ones that are making a profit. It's not all the others. It's not the ones that are struggling and have their fingernails up against the wall, trying to hold on, trying to keep a few employees employed, trying to make sure that the doors don't shut. The ones that are going to get this money, and the only ones that can get this money through tax cuts, are those that are making a profit. So they're going to make more profit.

I'm not opposed to profit, but there is nothing tied to that profit at all. There's nothing that ties down that they have to keep their employees. There's nothing that ties it down so that they can't take the money and move it offshore.

There are companies, and particularly banks—I've been warned that some of the banks are starting to move their operations to India. Now, do I care that they move it to India? Yes, I do. I care because thousands of Canadians rely upon those jobs. Thousands of people in Ontario and in this city of Toronto rely on those jobs. They're going to move them offshore. We're going to give them money to move it offshore.

This is what was talked about in the beginning. This is what the government has not looked at at all. This is what the government has not put through their heads: When you give these corporations a lot of money, there are only a couple of things they can do with it. They want to go out there and maximize their profits, and they're going to maximize them in any way they can. That includes moving offshore, moving the jobs to Mexico, moving the jobs to China, moving the jobs to India, and there's nothing in here that compels them to keep those jobs in Canada. So to say that you're going to create the jobs is a huge pipe dream.

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I have some real difficulties as well knowing that they're making a profit. I have some real difficulties when I look down those shareholders' lists and the corporate boards of directors' lists and see what they do with the money. Most of the money ends up in corporate pockets. The executives make $500,000, $800,000, $1 million, $2 million a year. This money is just going to go there. They're all going to get a raise. Everybody who's making $1 million a year is going to get a raise.

But what about the ordinary people who are paying the freight? What about those poor people? Every one of those poor people who are paying eight cents on every litre of gas, paying eight cents when they're trying to heat

their home on every single dollar of home heating fuel—every one of those, when they turn on and off the lights, knows that it's going to cost them eight cents more. In the end, it doesn't come back to them, because for every $1 that they contribute, $1.06 goes to the corporations. For every $1 they contribute, they're going to get 16 cents back in tax cuts. I hear the Minister of Revenue saying that there are going to be tax cuts for ordinary people. It amounts to 16 cents. The members opposite, I hope you're listening; that's what the tax cuts to ordinary people will amount to. They spend a buck; they get back 16 cents. If you wonder why the New Democrats are opposed, pretty much in a nutshell, that is it.

There have been lots of job losses: 200,000 in Ontario since December. Wages are down. Use of food banks is up by 120,000 people since March. I remember that the finance minister used to do this whole scenario: "This is up; this is up; this is up; this is down." I'm telling you, the opposite is true today. I'd like him to do that scenario today, because what he'd have to say is, "Unemployment is way up." He'd have to say, "The use of food banks is way up. The destitution of the people is way up. And what is down is our revenue." It's exactly the opposite of what he said a year ago, using those same theatrics. But do I see him saying that today? Not at all.

There are people out there who are suffering: our old, our children, and everybody except those who are getting the corporate tax cuts. If they were the answer, the United States would not be in recession, nor would Canada, nor would the world, because this is the failed policy that was followed by George Bush. And thank God, an end is being put to it by Mr. Obama. The banks cash in but the struggling businesses do not.

This government, and in particular this Premier, has been quite eloquent in past years criticizing such "a ridiculous policy," as even he characterized it over the years. A few examples of things he had to say over the years:

On March 20, 2008, the Premier of Ontario made the following statement:

"What the Conservatives are asking us to do is to cut corporate income taxes—those are taxes on profitable corporations—by $2.3 billion.... That definitely means closing hospitals, firing nurses, cutting education. It means driving up tuition fees. It means cutting the Ministry of the Environment and the like, and it means running a deficit." Dalton McGuinty, 2008.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, it wasn't just isolated. May 14, 2002—and I remember, he wasn't the Premier then, but he was the opposition leader:

"They just have to tell their friends on Bay Street that the $2.2 billion in corporate tax breaks they were expecting is something we just can't afford.... The truth is that this government is terrible with money."

Or how about December 5, 2001, when the Premier said—or the then opposition member, now Premier, said: "Minister, you say that you have to make cuts. We say you could easily cut your $2.2-billion corporate tax cut"? Dalton McGuinty.

Or how about November 20, 2001? "Quite simply, we believe that health care, public education and the protection of our environment are greater priorities than cutting corporate taxes by an additional $2.2 billion. Our priorities are the priorities of our working families."

Last but not least, one of my really favourite ones, October 15, 2001—that was the month after I first arrived in this place. I remember hearing this quote from the Premier, the then Leader of the Opposition:

"Minister, you remain committed to your $2.2-billion corporate tax cut. It seems to me it's becoming very clear that this cut in corporate taxes is going to leave you with one of two options: You are either going to run deficits or you are going to make serious and further dramatic cuts to health care, education and the environment."

That was Dalton McGuinty. That was the man who is the Premier of this province. That is the man who was telling us to believe him, that the things he once denounced are now somehow the mantra that he wants to embrace.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time, and I have only a couple of minutes left. I want to talk about our First Nations people. I don't know how much has been talked about them since this debate began because, as I said, there have been many bells rung. The First Nations people of this province are amongst the most destitute people in our land. If anyone has an opportunity to go up into the Treaty 7 and Treaty 9 areas in northern Ontario, you will see poverty, you will see destitution, you will see despair, you will see children who have no opportunity—no opportunity for jobs. You will see them sniffing glue, you will see them drinking alcohol, you will see ordinary people in total despair, and what is this bill going to do to them? Right now they do not pay the 8% provincial sales tax when they live on the reserve or in the First Nation community. They are exempt. But when you pass this bill, every single thing that they buy on that reserve is going to be subject to 8%. It's not like me. I'm only going to pay on the gas and the hydro and the lawyer's fees and the professional fees. They are going to pay on absolutely everything.

They're going to pay 8% on every item that they have been exempt on up to this point. They live in despair, they live in poverty, and their cost of living is going to go up by 8% because this government is in bed with the federal Conservatives. They have not been able to argue, they have not been able to make a deal, and they are going to charge the poorest people in this land all of that money. I think that if there is one disgrace, that is it. I'm from Toronto. I don't have any First Nations communities. I do have a few First Nations people, but I don't have any reserves. But I want to tell you that I have seen it and I know what it costs. Those who've had the opportunity to travel across northern Ontario—and I see the minister here and he knows it—you go into the Northern Store and you will pay $20 for a bag of potatoes; you will pay $18 for a bag of milk; you will pay

for things what you cannot even believe. I know when the member from Willowdale went, he looked at his favourite ice cream, which he could buy in Toronto for $3. It cost how much? 12 bucks?

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Fourteen dollars. He just told me $14. That is now going to be subject to 8% HST. So not only can they not eat that ice cream, but if they do, it's going to cost them an extra buck and a half to get it. That's the whole thing of what's happening up there.

This government says, "Oh, I'm concerned," but have I heard them exempting the First Nations community? No, I have not. Have I heard them talking about the poverty that is endemic to those people? No, I have not. If you want to know why I stand here in rage, in moral outrage over all of this, it's not so much how it hurts my constituents, and indeed it does, but I see that those people who are being hurt the most are the ones who can least afford to be hurt.

If we want to forge that new relationship with the people of the north, if we are truly, truly wanting to talk about the treaties that Ontario signed, Treaty 9 and Treaty 7, of which we are treaty partners—pretty rare; we are treaty partners—then I think we have to have a whole look at this HST and we have to look at how it is going to affect them. They have not been consulted, they are angry and they need to be listened to.

This government needs to make sure that what they are doing that really hurts the people of this province does not hurt the people of our northern communities any more than it hurts those in the south. I think that some real changes have to be made.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time; I can see you looking at your watch. I think my time is up, and so I would stop now. The balance of my time will be used by the leader of the New Democratic Party on the next occasion.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member is correct. It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Thursday, November 26, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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No. 193

Nº 193

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 26 November 2009

Jeudi 26 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Yesterday in debate I said that the region of Durham would be paying $7 million. I misspoke. It was $700,000. I just wanted to correct the record.

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I usually say it's my pleasure to rise in the Legislature to debate legislation. Unfortunately, it's a displeasurable experience today, because this of course is the last chance for anybody really, and specifically New Democrats in this case, to have something to say on second reading of Bill 218, the bill that ushers in the harmonized sales tax by this Liberal McGuinty government.

I have to say that we have been very vocal in our opposition to this wrong-headed move by the government. I say "wrong-headed" specifically and purposely. Why? Because this government is prepared to basically bring in a piece of legislation that hits families when they're already down; a bill, a tax measure, that makes life a heck of a lot less affordable, at a time when the people of this province are suffering significantly from a protracted recession, from a downturn in the economy.

People are losing their jobs. People are losing their pensions. People are not able to find a job to replace the one they've lost. They're losing their homes. Their quality of life is being reduced significantly. And that has been happening month after month after month. Over 200,000 jobs have been lost in this year alone. And what does this government do to respond to this crisis in job loss, to this crisis in quality of life that we're facing in this province? They decide to hit people with an 8% tax increase on all kinds of goods and services that they rely on, on a daily basis.

The lack of consideration, the extent to which this government is completely out of touch with the people of this province, whom they are supposed to be governing in the best interests of, is absolutely incredible. The arrogance is unbelievable. This government has decided to close their eyes, to close their ears and to plow ahead with something that is going to hurt people at a time when what they really want is a government that brings solutions to the table that actually help them get back on their feet. This province will go nowhere as long as the people in this province are hurting. I have to tell you: This government might not realize it, but the people are hurting; they're hurting very, very deeply right now.

At a time when this economy is at a stall—and we know what happens when there's an economic stall. People are told by economists and others that the best way to address that stall is to get people spending again; right? Get them spending again. That'll stimulate the economy. And what does this government do at a time when we need people to be spending, we need consumers to start spending money in the economy? They bring in a tax measure that's going to do exactly the opposite of what we need to happen. People are going to spend less with prices that are going up because of the HST. They're not going to be spending more.

So again we have this government that is bringing in a tax policy that is exactly the opposite of what we need right now. And as if that isn't bad enough, as if those two things aren't bad enough, the harmonized sales tax is also a policy that reduces the rate of job growth in the province of Ontario. That's not something I've come up with on my own. That's something that the C.D. Howe Institute—not an organization that I tend to quote often—very clearly, in their studies over the last year or so, indicates: that some 38,000 jobs will not be created as a result of this government's wrong-headed policy on harmonization of taxes.

But they're not the only ones; they are not the only ones. Another organization that I don't tend to quote from very often, but from time to time and in this case specifically: the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. What does the

Ontario Chamber of Commerce say? The Ontario Chamber of Commerce says the exact same thing as the C.D. Howe Institute says: 40,000 fewer jobs are going to be created because of the harmonization of the sales tax.

Now, I've got to say, if I'm not mistaken, that this economy has been shedding jobs by the tens of thousands every single month: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, 200,000 jobs in this year alone, some 350,000 jobs over the last couple of years. These are real people. These aren't just statistics. These are families. These are folks who are now at the end of their unemployment insurance and starting to go and apply for welfare. How do I know that? In my community alone, the welfare rolls have ballooned by almost 3,000 caseloads—and that's my community alone. It's happening across the province; I can tell you that.

So at a time when what we need the most is more jobs, is more opportunity, is hope for people in this economy, what does their government do? Their government brings in a tax measure that reduces opportunity, that slows down the rate of job growth, that tells them, "Too bad, so sad. We know you need a job, but we would rather whack you with an 8% tax increase than give you any opportunity whatsoever, give you any hope for the future."

Shame on this arrogant government. Shame on them for not listening to the people of this province—because that is the other thing: It's not just New Democrats who are extremely critical of this tax. It is people in every walk of life, in every corner of this province who are telling this government, "Stop; don't do this. Don't hurt us while we're already hurting. Do something that gives us hope, that provides us with opportunity"—but they're simply not listening.

I have to say I've had the opportunity to listen myself. I've listened carefully to what the people are saying, and it's interesting that this government, in its response to the criticisms that we've been levelling against the tax, dug up an economist—a neo-conservative, heavy right-wing economist from the University of Alberta. They paid this person to write a report that claims that, in fact, jobs will increase. The government has taken this one person, who has not had any of his report corroborated by any peers; they've taken this person's report that they paid for—of course, the government knows how to pay for consultants and overpriced reports; we've seen that over and over in eHealth and many other situations—and what do they do? They take this isolated report, the opinion of one person that they paid for, and they fly it out there like somehow it's the truth. We all know it's not the truth. We all know that the government bought and paid for that opinion, and now it's shopping it out there like it actually has meaning. Shame on them trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of this province. Guess what? The people of this province are simply not buying it.

What are they saying? What do they say when I go to Kitchener, when I go to Cambridge, when I go to Windsor, when I go to Ottawa, when I go to Cornwall—which is where I'm going this weekend, and very much looking forward to it—when I'm at home in Hamilton, when I go to Timmins, when I'm in Sudbury, when I'm here in Toronto? What are people telling me? They're telling me that they don't want the government to implement this tax. They're telling me that they think it's the wrong thing to do. They're telling me that they don't believe that savings will be passed on. They're telling me, as small business owners, that this tax is going to hurt them, too. They're telling me, as single parents, that they can't afford to make ends meet for them and their children right now. They're telling me, as senior citizens, that there isn't enough money to pay the bills as it is. And they tell me they're afraid. They tell me they're afraid of what the impact is going to be when this tax is levied upon them in the middle of next year, if this government has its way.

0910

I say "if the government has its way" because there really is still time to change course. There is time for this government to change course. I urge every MPP—not necessarily every government member, but every MPP—to go back to your ridings and look your people in the face, the people who put you here, and understand and listen to their concerns. Because if they're telling me when I go into your ridings, then I know darned well they're telling you too. If hundreds of thousands of them are responding to our requests on the Internet to join our campaign through our unfairtaxgrab.com website, then I know that they're calling you as well. Whether you're responding to them, I don't know. Whether you're hearing them—I can tell you, the evidence up until now is that you're not. And you need to. That's your job; that's your obligation; that's your responsibility.

I wanted to put a few things on the record from people who have actually sent me some comments about the harmonized sales tax. I can debate the merits from the perspective of the legislation itself, but I think it's important that, as this government continuously refuses to hear from the people of this province in a public hearings process that is simply democratic, the alternative is, granted, a poor alternative in some ways, but at least it's an alternative to get some of their voices on the record here in the Legislature. Because, unfortunately, this government has not only chosen to shut down debate on this bill, but also to avoid going to the people, to avoid every opportunity to hear what people have to say by refusing to take it to public hearings. It's one of the biggest tax changes in the province's history, and this government refuses to take it out to public hearings. Talk about dampening of democracy; talk about shutting down democracy in this province. It's absolutely shameful.

Nancy Bailey from Sault Ste. Marie says: "We are barely on our feet now and the last thing all of us need, especially in northern Ontario, is another tax." Why does Nancy say "especially in northern Ontario"? Because in northern Ontario, people already pay more for pretty much everything. People in northern Ontario have to use their cars to go everywhere. They don't have the same kind of transit system that centres like Toronto have. So they're filling up their tanks much more often than the people in southern Ontario. And guess what? Their gas

prices are already higher than the ones in southern Ontario—by about what, Mr. Bisson?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: About 10 to 12 cents.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So, 10 to 12 cents. The member from Timmins–James Bay is corroborating the fact that, on average, about 10 to 12 cents per litre higher is what people in northern Ontario have to pay for their gas. Now that 8% is going to hit them that much harder. That's why Nancy Bailey is really worried in Sault Ste. Marie, as are many, if not all, of the people I've spoken to in northern Ontario.

Don Warner, from Windsor: "As a lifelong citizen of Ontario, I wish to express my deep displeasure with our Liberal government. Please vote this legislation down."

Doug and Kathy White, from Stratford: "We are a small seasonal business that is taxed enough. With the tourism from the USA down over the last nine years, all we need is something else, the HST, to drive away more guests. B&Bs"—bed and breakfasts—"are just getting by in Stratford, and the number has dropped over the last five years."

This is not specific to Stratford. I have spoken to people throughout Ontario who are in the travel and tourism business. They do not want this tax. They have told me specifically, directly. In fact, I was at the farmers' market in St. Catharines not too long ago. A small business couple—two people who own two small businesses—approached me and said, "You keep fighting that tax. We're small business owners, and we think it's the wrong thing and it's going to hurt us."

The government likes to say that business supports it. There is no homogeneous group of business people who support this. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a survey, and almost 60% of the small business members of that organization say they can find nothing of value whatsoever in the harmonized sales tax. Other businesses are telling me that they have to switch around all their accounting practices and all their invoicing processes and their cash registers and everything else, and it's going to be a big pain that they simply don't need.

This government claims to want to talk to businesses. They claim that this is a big tax move that is supported by all business. They are not telling people what is really going on out there. But guess what? The people are telling us, and that is extremely important. And I value their opinions, obviously much more than the government does.

S. Hendry, of Toronto: "I am opposed to the HST, as are all other Ontarians who must try to make a living while running a small business, and trying to keep above water."

Robert Jones, Amherstburg: "I oppose the HST as it is a regressive tax against consumers, particularly middle- and lower-income Ontarians. I do not believe companies will pass on any PST savings. Consumers … will be burdened with much higher costs, particularly on gasoline, electricity and services previously exempt."

This is a pile of responses that have come in to my office, and it is a mere sampling of the thousands upon thousands of people who have contacted us and begged us to do everything we can to get this government to do the right thing by the people of this province. The right thing is to get off this tax track. The right thing is to make sure they listen to the people of this province. They can do that in two ways. They can do that by simply walking away from this wrong-headed move, but the other way they can do that is to actually give the voters of this province the respect of having an opportunity to tell their government directly what they think about this move.

Shame on this arrogant bunch that they refuse to go out and listen to the concerns, the issues and the worries that the people of this province have. Shame on them. We all know that at the end of the day this government can ram this bill through as fast as they want, and they can shut down debate and they can silence the public, and that's what they are doing—I don't know what ever happened to democracy in this province, but I haven't seen it in a while.

But another thing has to happen: The federal Parliament also has to pass legislation to make this bill live here in Ontario and actually make the changes that need to be made. All I would say is that I expect the members in this Legislature who have influence over that particular House—that particular Parliament, our federal Parliament—to go there and talk to those MPs and tell them that although they were forced to vote in a certain way in this chamber, perhaps in the other chamber they can save the day and not approve either the $4.3-billion poison pill, I guess, that the other opposition party talks about. Don't let that $4.3 billion flow, because, guess what? This government can't implement the tax. But also don't allow the legislation to pass that enables this change to take place.

My requests are simple: I want this government to listen to the people of this province and do the right thing: Go on public hearings. If you refuse to do that, then the next thing you can do is shut down this harmonized sales tax once and for all and forever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? The honourable member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My thanks to the member from Hamilton Centre and leader of the third party, and to the member from Beaches–East York for their lead off speeches yesterday and today, and particularly to say how pleased I am that over the past few days they have used a modest amount of time available to them for the purposes of speaking to Bill 218 and not having used other tactics that have been used in this place, which I may get 30 seconds to speak on as well.

Let me suggest, as well, to the members opposite in the third party, and to the members of the official opposition, that this is the place for debate. We are each here representing our constituencies and representing the parties to which we are elected in the positions they have. It's a wonderful opportunity for us to speak on behalf of those positions and, effectively, on behalf of thousands of

constituents, all of whom may not agree with each of our individual positions, but nonetheless it's an opportunity for us to do that. So I'm happy and pleased they have had that opportunity provided to them.

0920

I said yesterday, and I'll say it again today in the 40 seconds I have left, that we would have had much more opportunity if members had five minutes each to speak. In the two hours of dead air that we had while bells were ringing from the official opposition, that would have been 24 more speakers in this place, in addition to those who have spoken already. There's been more opportunity available than has been provided to us.

I want to take my last 20 seconds to acknowledge the member from Nepean–Carleton, who got up this morning to indicate that she had misinformation yesterday in regard to the region of Durham and the impacts they said the HST might have on them. As a member who represents an area in Durham region, it's important for me to reinforce that. The figures that were provided to us yesterday were tenfold wrong: not $7 million but, as the member said this morning, some $700,000, a very—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the member from the third party, the leader, making her statements. In my minute and 50 seconds, I'm going to read some comments from people from Liberal ridings who are being underrepresented here today.

From Scarborough–Rouge River: "With the regressive HST applying to most goods and services, will Ontarians be able to take advantage of this generosity? Getting to Tim Hortons for a coffee and a bagel may be problematic if an outlet is not nearby and someone can't afford to put gas in their vehicle to get there. If one decides on takeout, will they return home to a cold, dark house because they couldn't afford to pay their utility bill?" That's from Warren Dalton.

Let's move on to London: "When revenue minister John Wilkinson said the HST will make Ontario more competitive and will attract investment and jobs, he must be reminded of one thing. It will cost us, the taxpayers, dearly, while it helps the Liberals make good on promises they never should have made." That's from Paul A. Leinweber.

From Algoma–Manitoulin, Larry Killens writes, "There is no harmony with the impending implementation of the harmonized sales tax between Ontario and Canada."

From Barrie, Rick Winson writes, "This new sales harmonized tax (SHT) will only serve to drive Ontario's economy further underground than it already is. With the number of people who are, or soon will be, unemployed, it's going to be very easy to find someone willing to provide services under the table for cash."

I'll move on to Belleville: "I am worried about it. I've got to get gas in my car and I'll be paying more for it. I have to heat my home and I'll be paying more for that too. I think it'd be better if they'd just leave it alone." That's from Art Lynas in Belleville.

From Windsor: "I think it stinks.... It's going to hurt a lot of people." That's from Betty Cooke.

Steve Peters—not our Speaker—from Windsor says, "The business community will realize a minor savings in their bookkeeping costs, but the net result will be increased costs resulting in increased prices for consumers."

Finally, Doug Chivers from Oakville: "Harmonizing the PST and GST is simply another cash grab for an already inept, out-of-fiscal-control government body."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add a few words to the ones that were spoken by my leader this morning. She has spoken for the people who won't have a voice because this government is refusing to go out and listen to them.

In my riding alone, I have hundreds of people who are contacting me. My riding is very close to the riding of Sudbury, held by a Liberal member, and 750 people, residents of Sudbury, came to me because they cannot be heard by their own member in Sudbury. They came to me because they want their voice to be heard. They don't want this tax.

For the people of northern Ontario, to have 8% more to pay on gas, 8% more to pay on heating fuel represents a huge amount of their budget. We do not have public transit. There has never been a bus in Whitefish, and there will probably never be one, for a number of reasons. We need our cars to go anywhere. That means we fill up twice a week. That means 8% more on a $50 fill-up. I will let you do the math; it adds up really quick. It adds up to people right now who don't have a job, who are on strike, who have a hard time making ends meet.

We have lots of professional services right now. You're looking at chiropractors and massage therapists who have a hard time making ends meet because of the financial hardship situation that Sudbury and Nickel Belt are in right now with the strike and the recession. They come to me, sometimes crying, saying, "When this 8% comes, France, it's going to mean the end of my business." One of them has been in business in the Hanmer mall for a long time, and she wants her business to continue, but that will be the end of her, and lots of professsional services that are barely hanging on through the recession—that will be the end of them. Why are we killing those jobs?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: It's a great pleasure for me to comment on the member for Hamilton Centre's speech. Let me tell you, I do believe that people are opposed to the HST—because they are misinformed. At the present time, if we were to tell the truth to the people—93% of the people of this province will benefit from a tax reduction.

Let me give you a good example: a trucking company at the present time that has to purchase a truck for $70,000. Did you tell them that in the end, after the purchase, he will receive $5,600 back? That is an amount

of money that he used to pay to the government, and today this is coming back to him. The elderly are going to get a $500 deduction on their municipal taxes. Low-income families—we are telling people that they will be—I was listening to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He was saying that this is going to be an increase of 13%—completely, completely false. When we're saying that everybody is going to pay an 8% increase in taxes, that is completely false.

Can we tell the people the truth, what they will benefit on top of that? Any seniors who are getting even $100,000 will benefit on the first $37,000 with a deduction on their income tax, and if they qualify as low-income people, they'll get up to $260 per head, and on top of that, they'll get a $500 deduction on their municipal taxes. So why don't we tell the truth to the people of this province on what is the effect of the HST?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable leader of the third party has up to two minutes for her response.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I appreciate and want to thank the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, the member from Nepean–Carleton, the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for their remarks.

One thing that's very clear is that it appears that the government members, because this is their bill, this is their initiative, this is their effort, like to talk in terms of theory and in terms of these companies and individuals who aren't real but who are scenarios. What they need to do is look at the real scenarios on the ground of the people in this province and what they're facing with the implementation of this harmonized sales tax. What they need to do is what we're doing, which is get out into the community and talk to real people and real businesses about how they see the impacts of this tax.

My colleague from the Nickel Belt riding did exactly that. I've attempted to do that as well, in some of the issues that I've brought forward not only in my debate today but every single day in question period. I'm bringing real issues from real businesses, from real people, to this table. Unfortunately, the government likes to read a lot of studies and theorize about a lot of impacts, but what people are saying is that the real impact of this harmonized sales tax is not going to be all smelling like roses, the way the government says it's going to be. It is going to hurt people when they're already hurting. It is going to reduce the rate of job growth in this province by some 40,000 jobs. It is going to dampen down consumer spending at the very time when we need to see more consumer spending to stimulate our economy. It is a wrong-headed tax. It's shifting the tax burden from the corporate sector to consumers. It is the wrong thing to do. New Democrats oppose it, and so do most Ontarians.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to enter into the debate. I just wanted to give a bit of a history lesson before I start into the specifics.

We heard a lot of the same conversation that we're hearing from the other side of the House with regard to the budget and the economic stimulus. There was not only the harmonization but also a stimulus package in that budget. We heard how it was the wrong plan, the wrong time, and everything was wrong. But you know what? I pick up the paper today and I read, "'Good News' for Oshawa as GM Announces up to 700 Jobs."

I say to the people across the way: The fact that we are not agreeing with their position does not mean that we are not listening to our constituents. We in fact are listening to our constituents, and we gave the people the opportunity by making it a part of our budget many, many months ago. As members, we have gone out, we have sent out householders, we have held public meetings, we have been to every event and gone to chambers of commerce and Probus. We have done so much, and we have done that because we know that it's the right plan, the right time, to grow Ontario, to make Ontario strong.

I say to the members across the way: You fought us so hard when we brought forward the budget. It was a very multi-faceted budget. But as they would say in my riding, the proof is in the pudding: "'Good News' for Oshawa as GM Announces up to 700 Jobs."

I say to the members across the way: You were wrong then and you're wrong now. We have a plan, and we have a strong drive to move our plan forward because we know that it is the right plan for the people of Ontario.

I look at the negotiations with the federal government, because that's an important component that we need to speak to. I just want to share with the House that my federal member is firmly on board with the harmonization. He comes from a manufacturing background himself, in the auto sector. I can tell you, because he worked in finances for the auto sector, that he can cite chapter and verse how important it is for my local company, called Wescast, and what that represents in savings for him.

I say to you, when I stand up in this House, my municipality of north Huron—they're laughing across the way. This is no joke. I tell you, my communities in north Huron, they're hurting, the auto sector. They know that the stimulus package we put in place, the harmonization, is what we need in our community to grow Ontario. That's why I see "'Good News' for Oshawa."

People know that we have to change how we did business. Things have changed. One hundred and thirty countries around the globe know that things have changed. They recognize that how we have done business must change. We must plan for the future. I am concerned about the ability for my children to have a job and, hopefully, some day, grandchildren that don't have four legs.

We know that we have our plan in place. I know that across the way, and now the third party, they have stuck to their position. I tell you, I'd probably get whiplash from how quickly the position of the official opposition changes: They were, they weren't, they were, they weren't, they were, they weren't, and they're back at "not" again. But I'm thinking that they're going to be in favour again in a few short months, especially when we see how

effective our budget was, when we pick up the paper and we see jobs coming back. That's what it's about: having a commitment to a plan and then ensuring that that plan moves forward.

We realize in Ontario that the manufacturing sector must strengthen. So, then, what can we do within the manufacturing sector to strengthen that? Certainly, the harmonization is an important component of that plan.

Mr. Speaker, you know that in the riding of Huron–Bruce, one of our main economic drivers is agriculture. So I say to the Speaker: What, then, as a good member, do you look at in any package coming forward? How does that affect my agricultural community? And, yes, they have told me.

One of the things that we've heard from the other side of the House is with our farmers: "Oh, that's what they do in Quebec, that's what they do in Quebec, that's what they do in Quebec." That's important. They supported their agricultural community. But I say to the members across the way: Where do you think a lot of those tax advantages came from, for the farmers? They came from the harmonization. By moving forward with a harmonization package, a lot of the tax incentives that were given to the Quebec farmers which you cited in the House day after day—we come forward with a package that reflects that, and where are you now? You're opposed to it. But I don't think that will last long, because I think you'll flip, and then you're going to be in favour again, once the farmers—one thing I would like to say is, I think it's important, when we look at point-of-sale exemptions and how it was in the province—possibly that's something that the federal government would like to look at as the harmonization moves forward: point-of-sale exemptions. That is a concern of my agricultural community.

What are the other economic drivers in the wonderful riding of Huron–Bruce? Energy. I can tell you, in order for energy to remain strong as an economic driver, it needs to be producing energy for something. What would it be producing for, if it wasn't doing it for the manufacturing sector? The manufacturing sector is such an important component, and we can have people who stand up and say, "I don't have this; I don't have that," but we recognize that for all of our ridings, having a strong manufacturing sector, specifically part of the auto sector, is an important component of our financial security within the province of Ontario.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Carol, did you see this? General Motors is recalling workers.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's what I said, yes. You know, this is so important; it's critical. One of the things that I know from my community, the ag community, is that they see the auto sector as such an important part of that.

Mr. Speaker, I just have so much more to say, but unfortunately—I just wanted to reinforce how important it is that we bring this tax package forward to move Ontario forward. Thank you for giving me the time today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's interesting to note that the member opposite thinks that their budget and their economic plan is actually good for the province. I guess there's this side, that side and the truth. I think the truth speaks for itself with the numbers. Since this government took office, they have gone from first to worst in economic growth in the nation, even behind Prince Edward Island. They have lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. So, yes, we should be welcoming the ones that were announced yesterday by Jerry Ouellette, the member for Oshawa. But we must always remember that they lost 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs. Next week, we will be celebrating the one-year anniversary of the largest province in Canada being on federal welfare.

Now is not the time to raise taxes—not 8% on consumption. That's why we know, for example, that the people in each of the ridings, particularly in the backbenches, are opposed to this tax. They don't feel that their voice is being heard, and that's why they're reaching out to the Progressive Conservative Party, that's why they're reaching out to the third party, and that's why they're writing letters to the editor and calling talk radio—not just because that's what Mr. McGuinty views as the only option to put forward your views on the HST. That was, of course, callous, to tell Ontarians, "If you don't like the HST, don't come to Queen's Park; don't call me. Call Bill Carroll, call Steve Madely, call Lowell Green." In fact, he just told people to write a letter to the editor and go to the water cooler and gripe about it.

The reality is, I think Ontarians are too smart for this gang of troublemakers next door and across the hall here. They know that this group here has no mandate to shove this tax down our throat, and they're expecting public debate. You know, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to continue to call for public hearings into the legislation, and we don't think it's done. After they decided to shove this through, it's not over, because we are going to continue the fight right through their budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You know, it's fascinating—yesterday on CBC, on the Andy Barrie show, they had the Minister of Revenue, who has been doing the song-and-dance routine selling the HST across Ontario; he spoke. Then, today, they had the response to his words. The VoxBox, as everybody who listens to Andy Barrie knows, was just full of response. And guess what? It was uniformly negative.

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It particularly rang with one woman who phoned in. She was a senior who lives on a fixed income, and she said, "I don't know what this person"—the Minister of Revenue—"is talking about. First of all, I'm not going to get any tax rebate because I don't pay any tax; I don't make enough to pay any tax. But I'm certainly going to be paying tax using the HST: I'm going to be paying tax on my utilities and paying tax on everything I purchase at the store, just about." And she said, "Quite frankly, I

can't afford it. I don't know who he's speaking to," said this woman who's a senior; an intelligent senior.

The folks opposite like to characterize seniors as not understanding, not being able to read, not quite comprehending the intricacies of the HST, but the reality is that seniors are incredibly intelligent. They're very smart. They read, they understand how the tax is going to affect them and they respond.

There was also a small business owner who phoned in. He said that it's going to kill his business. It's going to drive his business—he is a small contractor—underground. He competes with those who currently are in the black market; they don't pay any tax at all. He said they'll win and revenues will go down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First I want to stand up and congratulate the member from Huron–Bruce for outlining the importance of the tax reform. That was a very important speech. I want to thank you very much on behalf of my constituents and all the people listening to us this morning.

She's right. She talked about the opposition; the opposition flip-flops all day. We don't know where they stand. To the member from Huron–Bruce: You're right. I guess in the end they're going to come up and support it. As a matter of fact, they support it now. But they see an opportunity to attack the government, and that's why they can take positions to attack us. As a matter of fact, the deputy opposition leader is the wife of the finance minister of Canada, who is the author of this issue and who has always been pushing for it because it's good for Ontario and Canada.

For the honourable member from Huron–Bruce: You are also right; this one starts to see the effects of the tax reform. Oshawa GM is rehiring 700 people back to work. It's important news.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Ingersoll.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Ingersoll. The member from Oxford, I think, knows the impact of our government on the Oxford region, where we worked very hard to get the Toyota plant to come to Woodstock, and many other components.

The member from Huron–Bruce talked about farmers and agriculture. They have a right now to claim more than ever for their equipment. I think it's an important step to support the agricultural centres. We believe, as a government, that this tax reform will affect farmers, education and health care for the people of Ontario.

I read a lot of articles about it. Maybe at the beginning, because of the confusion about how it's going to be implemented, people got scared because of something they're not used to, but in the end people kind of like it, because it's going to come back to Ontarians with more jobs, more comfort and more competitiveness nationally and internationally.

Again, I support this bill, and I want to thank you again, member from Huron–Bruce, for outlining the importance of this tax reform for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the debate on Bill 218—the member for Huron–Bruce and her speech. But I first of all would like to apologize that I rose yesterday on a point of order and suggested that the member from Beaches–East York had missed his lead because he was at a reception. That was true, but he had been invited by Advocis to speak to that reception a month ahead of time. So really he wasn't missing in action; he just couldn't be in two places at one time.

On Bill 218: You know, it's interesting. The Minister of Revenue was on CBC Radio yesterday. I heard him making his pitch—and he does a good job of selling why he thinks Bill 218 is a good bill. But I also listened this morning, and the only calls coming in to CBC were from people who—actually, one lady called in and said, "You know, he made a good pitch. He talked about tax cuts, but I don't pay any income tax so it's only going to be money going out for me." I think that's true, and I've read a lot of e-mails into the record to that effect.

Another person was in business, and I've read a lot of e-mails into the record to do with the underground economy and how it's going to grow. The other call was a businessperson calling up to say that they already are competing against the people who don't want to pay the 5% GST; now there's going to be an extra 8%. So this person, a legitimate businessperson, will be at a 13% disadvantage in terms of competing against the underground economy. I've certainly had many e-mails from people worried about an increase in the underground economy as a result of this move by the McGuinty government to bring this HST in.

I would still like to say that they should be doing public hearings. We've been asking for public hearings. Instead, they've filed a time allocation motion to ram this through—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

The honourable member for Huron–Bruce has up to two minutes for her response.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I do want to thank the speakers from Nepean–Carleton, Parkdale–High Park, London–Fanshawe and Parry Sound–Muskoka, and I do appreciate your comments.

I wanted to say that the members from across the way, the official opposition, have started their day with two apologies, and I think that speaks volumes.

One of the things that I wanted to speak specifically about was the misinformation that we started off with, with the region of Durham. Quite frankly, I've known Roger a long time, so I bet you he was on the phone straightening things out plenty quick. I have 19 municipalities, so I hear a lot from my municipalities as well. But the fact that two apologies were required already speaks a lot.

From the riding that I represent, we like to call a spade a spade. We like to mean what we say and say what we mean. When we talk, we like to talk with authority. So I

say to the members from across the way: If you are so convinced that we are on the wrong path, stand in your place and say that you will reverse it if you have the honour and the privilege to represent the government, because I'll tell you, from my riding, if you don't—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I'd ask the member for Nepean–Carleton to refrain from yelling at the member from Huron–Bruce. The honourable member for Huron–Bruce has the floor.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I think we were both raised in the back 40. But anyway, one thing that I will say, and I want to reinforce this: If you are so firmly convinced, stand in your place today, stand in your place, stand up, and promise the people that if you have the honour and the privilege, you will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak briefly to Bill 218 this morning on behalf of my constituents in Wellington–Halton Hills. Of course, this Bill 218 is entitled An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and enact, amend or repeal various Acts. As we all know in this House, this is the infamous bill, probably the most significant piece of legislation that the government will introduce during this term of office—without question the most significant piece of legislation that they're going to introduce in this term of office, to implement the harmonized sales tax.

It's important that the members hear some of the context upon which we discuss and debate this issue. I recall very vividly and distinctly in the 2003 provincial election when the television ads were on and the Leader of the Opposition at that time, Dalton McGuinty, was on television with his ads. He looked into the camera and he said, "I won't raise your taxes." And again in 2007 the commitment was made: "I won't raise your taxes." Here we are today talking about a massive tax increase yet again.

Of course, the government would argue that this bill has offsetting tax cuts, but the fact is that the people of Ontario cannot believe this government when it comes to any statements on taxes. Fundamentally, that's what this debate is all about. In my riding, people don't believe the Liberal government on taxes; they just don't believe you. In fact, even if this bill passes, as you have the majority and you wish to do so, I suspect and would suggest that even if tax cuts are brought in as a result of this bill, if the government is re-elected in 2011, we'll see yet again the Liberal government going back on its previous track of raising taxes yet again.

As we know, this government has tabled a time allocation motion to try and ram this bill through the House. They're fearful of listening to the people through the public hearings process. They used to be a party that espoused the idea of public hearings, extensive public hearings on bills. Certainly, when they first took office in 2003, they were always prepared to send controversial bills through the public hearings process, and certainly we were glad to participate in that process.

0950

Why is it that today they won't allow any meaningful public hearings on Bill 218? I think the answer is fairly clear: They're afraid to hear from the people. Government members, even in their own ridings, I'm sure, are hearing from their constituents. I'm sure they're getting dozens of e-mails every day, as most of us on this side of the House are receiving. They know that they've got a real problem, and they know that there has been a poll taken that something like 76% of the people of Ontario are opposed to this tax.

The Minister of Revenue was assigned the task of going around and explaining this and selling it to people. I heard him on CBC radio yesterday as well, and although I thought some of his comments were quite disingenuous and replete with half-truths, in fact, he did his best to explain this to people. The fact is that the calls that were coming in today, from what I understand, on the CBC were expressing opposition.

Our party continues to call for public hearings. We will continue to use the means that are available to us through the standing orders to call for public hearings, to try to get this government to slow down, to try to get this government to listen, because I believe there still is an opportunity for modifications to this bill, and I would encourage the government to listen to it.

Let's talk about that. The government House leader talks about whether or not our party would repeal it if we formed the government. As you know, our critic for revenue has pointed out that it would be absolutely impossible because of the poison pill that's in the contract: the more than $4-billion penalty that the government of Ontario would have to pay.

But let's talk about what we would do, or what we would have done, going back to 2003, had we formed the government. First of all, had we formed the government in 2003, I believe that we would have made a sincere, concerted and successful effort to balance that budget in 2003-04. I know that we would have tried, and I know that you guys didn't try. The fact is, over the course of the 2003 to 2007 mandate, had we formed the government during that time, and were we still in government now, we would have restrained government spending over the last six years. We wouldn't be in this situation, where there's a $24-billion deficit. We wouldn't have promised the people that we wouldn't raise taxes and then in fact do it. We would not have done that. We would have continued on our approach that we'd done when we were in government from 1995 to 2003, which was on a path to reduce personal income taxes, to reduce corporate income taxes and, at the same time, balance budgets year after year. We wouldn't have been in this situation at all. So we wouldn't have to even talk about that argument right now, in terms of what we would do if we were in government today. We would be in a totally different fiscal situation.

Again, in the limited time I have available to me, I call upon this government to withdraw the time allocation motion, the draconian and drastic time allocation motion

that they've presented, to rethink this whole thing, to go back and understand that they're here to represent the people of the province too, that the people of the province need and deserve to have a say on this issue before this Legislature votes on this bill at third reading.

The fact is, we need to have extensive public hearings across the province. I know that the people of my riding would welcome the opportunity to come to hearings in communities like Georgetown or Acton or Fergus or Erin or Puslinch township or Rockwood. All of my communities would welcome that opportunity, and I know that in every community across the province there would be a significant number of people who would want to express their views on this.

I acknowledge that there are some voices out there that are supporting this. The government has done a job to try to get some third party endorsements: Certainly, the chamber of commerce, through Len Crispino's efforts—I think some of the chambers of commerce across the province see some advantages in the HST, and I acknowledge that. But the fact is, we are sitting on this side of the House, and it's our obligation, constitutionally as well as politically, to speak on behalf of the people who will be hurt by this legislation. Certainly, seniors are going to be hurt. We've heard from the housing industry. We've heard—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Tell the truth.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The member for Northumberland–Quinte West, I'd ask you to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'll withdraw, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): You cannot imply that an honourable member is not telling the truth.

The honourable member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I've obviously struck a nerve with the member for Northumberland, who, quite frankly, is not bringing forward his constituents' views on this issue, without question.

We understand, on our side of the House, that this bill represents a $3-billion tax grab that the people of Ontario cannot afford. We know that the government is unwilling, through reasonable public consultations, to listen to the people. Our caucus is disappointed but not surprised by the tactics of this government with respect to this bill. That's why we're going to continue to call for public consultation and use every tool at our disposal to try to prevent the swift passage of this bill and make sure that the people of Ontario have their say. I would suggest to the government House leader that this is not over, and we will continue to use whatever means we can to slow the government down in this respect.

I would like to take a moment or two to read into the record some of the comments that we have received from, for example, the tourism industry. I know that the government House leader is interested in this. I would hope she has had a chance to consult with some of the tourism industry folks because they have some serious concerns.

I would read a quote from the Greater Toronto Hotel Association, where they say the present tax structure on a hotel room is 5% PST, 5% GST, and the destination marketing fee in many communities, for a total of 13%. Harmonization may cause the new tax structure to be a total of 16%, or an additional 3% on the cost of a room in Ontario.

The Greater Toronto Hotel Association recommends that if harmonization of the existing GST and PST occurs, the provincial government commit that no additional tax burden be placed on the consumption of hotel rooms in the province of Ontario due to harmonization.

In the rounds when I'm finished speaking—I only have a minute and 22 seconds left—the government House leader and the Minister of Tourism perhaps could speak to that; perhaps she could commit to the Greater Toronto Hotel Association that this bill is not going to further harm their industry. I doubt she will.

We have heard from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I'd like to quote Kevin Gaudet:

"We think it's problematic that the government is looking at a tax reform policy that will benefit business at the expense of individuals and families. In principle, we like the idea of a blended tax, but not on the backs of individuals and families and put in during a recession. It's the wrong time."

I would come back to one of the points that I've been making on this debate with my constituents who have e-mailed me repeatedly. The economic recovery that we hope we are in right now is fragile. I would suggest that any new tax increase at this time is likely

to put us backwards in terms of economic recovery and make it tougher for our businesses,

families, seniors and communities to strengthen themselves as they want to in terms of economic recovery. Again, I call upon this government to allow for full and extensive public hearings on Bill 218 before we vote on it for third reading. I plead with the government to do this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I find this quite an amazing debate. I've had an opportunity to go door to door in my riding to ask people about the HST. To be honest, I've been going door to door, not trying to sell a position—although if people ask me, I tell them what I think—but to ask them, "What do you think about this bill? What do you think about the HST?"

What's interesting to me is talking to people who have small businesses. As the member from Parkdale–High Park was saying this morning when she talked about Andy Barrie's show and the businessperson who called in, I have people who have one- and two-person operations, who know that in the environment they operate in they're going to have to eat that tax. They are going to have to take it on, and it's going to cut their income; they are going to face a loss of revenue that is going to make it very difficult for them to carry forward.

I was talking to a man Monday night, a contractor, who just said, "I deal with too many people in my busi-

ness who are fly-by-night, who can charge really low. If I've got to charge 13% on top of my bill, I'm in trouble."

I talked to a photographer on the weekend. A similar situation: He's a one-person operation in a competitive environment. He's looking at a cut to his income. I talked to people who are musicians, and in fact, we had Jim Biros here, the executive director of Toronto Musicians' Association, who talked to me about musicians who play weddings, who go to parties, and who have enough trouble collecting any tax now. The thought of having to collect or actually having to send in payment to the government at 13% just means that their take-home is going to drop.

The reality of this tax is, it will drive down people's standard of living, it will make things far more difficult for seniors and for small business, and it is a large-scale mistake.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened carefully to the comments of the member of Wellington–Halton Hills. I'll just provide a little different perspective on this.

Last Thursday I had the pleasure of being in my riding of Peterborough with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, to announce an investment in GE Peterborough of $100 million.

Let me explain that. GE Corporate Canada are investing $85 million. The government of Ontario, through the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, will be investing $50 million. That's $100 million, the greatest investment in the Peterborough operation in four decades.

That morning, the CAW, which represents those hard-working men and women—remember, these are jobs paying $25, $30, $35 an hour. The investment we're making in Peterborough is to make the Peterborough operation the global leader in large motors, green energy projects, to put Ontario on the map. They're doing it right in my hometown of Peterborough.

Elyse Allan, a very distinguished president of GE Canada, said that morning in Peterborough, with the media there, "It's because Ontario is providing a new, improved, competitive jurisdiction in which we can invest that money."

Remember, GE worldwide has 320,000 employees. They have operations in every corner of the world, but they chose Peterborough to make a $100-million investment in the future of my community.

It is an enormous achievement, solidifying high-skilled jobs, solidifying engineering and other design functions in Peterborough to provide that platform for future growth. That's what our comprehensive tax policy is bringing to my community in Peterborough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend my colleague from Wellington–Halton Hills for his explanations and discussion on the HST bill and the imposition of this tax on the people of Ontario, who don't want it.

One of the things I was most impressed with is his insistence that, if nothing else, the government should have public hearings to let the people of Ontario speak, to be heard, about what they think about this new tax.

What I find interesting is that the government has been insistent, and now, having tabled a closure motion, has insisted that they're not going to hear from the public at all. They want to push this through as quickly as possible. The only way that the public can get into this Legislature and be heard is through their representatives here in the Legislature.

What I find interesting is that everyone on this side of the House has been speaking about comments they've heard from their constituents—in fact, from constituents in many of the Liberal-held ridings. In all the debate that I've sat here and listened to, I haven't heard the government side talk about any of the people in their ridings who are talking to them and letting them know what they think of this taxation.

I have come to the conclusion that what they're hearing is the same thing that I'm hearing, and I'm hearing nothing but comments from people—seniors and low-income people—who see this as a dramatic increase in the cost of living for them, and they want us to do whatever we can to stop it. I'm sure that the government members are getting those same things on their petitions and in their e-mails, but they're not bringing them here.

I want to say that the people who are represented by the government members are definitely not being heard in this Legislature through this process. I stand up here and I'm proud and happy to present the petitions that come from the Liberal-held ridings and let their voices be heard in this Legislature. But I really think there should be public hearings so we can all hear them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Questions and comments, or debate?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): One more.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay; I thought I was actually going to be up in debate.

I would just say the following, just to pick up on some of the comments that were made earlier: I know that a number of government members have gotten up and have spoken to how this is great for various businesses. I can tell you, a lot of the businesses I've been talking to, where I've been travelling around, have a completely different view.

One is Lloyd Richards, who owns L. Richards Moving and Cartage, up in Timmins. I've known Lloyd for a number of years. We're fellow pilots and I've known him for a number of years in that capacity, but also as somebody who is fairly involved in our community. For him and his trucking business, he's been pretty clear about this not being a good thing. On the one hand, the government is saying this is going to assist business when it comes to how you're going to be able to remit taxes for

goods and services in a much more efficient way, and he's saying that at the end of the day, nobody has even communicated with him or other businesses about what that new process is going to be, and the date is fast coming. That's one of the complaints. The other one is that at the end of the day they're going to end up having to pay taxes on things that they've never had to pay for before—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, it's administrative. His argument is that the government says, "Oh, yeah, but then you can file a form and you can get your money back." He says, "Jeez, all I'm doing is filing forms to the government for all kinds of things, so this is not making my life any easier," and that's pretty well the thing that I'm hearing from everybody. From the real estate agencies to people who are insurance brokers, people who sell financial products, the barber shop, retail services, a number of businesses that I've talked to not just in my riding but in other ridings that I've been travelling in around the province, it's pretty clear. So when I hear the government get up in the House and say, "This is a boon for business. Business is on side and we have their endorsement," I don't know who the heck you're talking to, because people are volunteering to me, without me even asking them, that they see this (a) as a tax grab, and (b) not necessarily as a thing that's better for business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Wellington–Halton Hills has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank and acknowledge the members who responded to my presentation this morning, especially my colleagues on this side of the House. I want to use this opportunity also to congratulate and commend our leader, Tim Hudak, our finance critic, Norm Miller, and our revenue critic, Lisa MacLeod, as well as the rest of my caucus colleagues who have done an outstanding job, I believe, on behalf of the people of Ontario on this issue.

As my friend the member for Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, just said to me, surely the government members are hearing from their constituents on this. Surely they are getting the same petitions that we're getting—they're not presenting them. Surely they are getting e-mails from their constituents. I get at least a dozen a day, it seems, on this issue, and I would say that they are individualized. It's not like there seems to be an organized campaign out there. People are spontaneously getting up in the morning and sending me an e-mail to express their concern and their opposition to this initiative. Surely the government members are hearing from their constituents. Why are they not speaking up on behalf of their constituents? Why aren't they going to a caucus meeting and telling the Premier what they are hearing in their ridings? Why are they all looking at their desks and trying to ignore me while I'm speaking now, when they were heckling me before?

I know why. They know what they are hearing from their constituents, and many of them are concerned about losing their seats over this. Quite frankly, this bill is so significant and it is so important, and because of the way the government is handling this issue, most of them do have a real fear and a legitimate fear of losing their seats over this issue. I suppose that if nothing else motivates them, hopefully because of the fear that they have of their constituents and facing their constituents in 2011, maybe some of them will speak up. If there are caucus meetings over the next few days—and I'm sure they'll have an opportunity to come together—maybe some of their members will speak up and urge the Premier to allow for public hearings on this issue. Give the people a chance to have their say. Give the people an opportunity to express their views. As we know, some people are in favour of this bill and there are some organizations that are for it. Why are you afraid to hear from the people? Why are you afraid of your constituents?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): As Frances Lankin, a former member in this House, used to say, "Don't feed the bears."

The honourable member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, there are some pretty big bears around here, and you wouldn't want to feed them either.

I just want to take the time I have in debate to put on the record the observations that I've had in discussions both with consumers and people who run businesses that I've been in touch with ever since this HST debate started.

The government goes out of its way to say that this is a great thing, that this is going to be the thing that's going to really enable the province's economy to move forward and create more jobs: It will be a boon for the manufacturing sector, a boon for the retailers and everybody else, and a boon for the consumer.

I've got to say, from my observations as a result of talking to many people who are going to be affected by this tax, that completely the opposite is what we're getting back as feedback, first of all from the consumer. We live in a northern climate. It doesn't matter if you live in Toronto or—I guess it matters if you live in Timmins or Moosonee; I know it's a heck of a lot colder than it is down here. But the point is, we all pay heating bills.

Just on the fact alone of having to pay an additional 8% on your heating fuel, on your electricity or on your natural gas, it's going to be another cost to the consumer that they've never had to pay before. On gasoline that you buy for your vehicle, there will be taxes that you've never had to pay before. On many services—I'll get to the goods later—where you've not had to pay the PST but, yes, the GST, you're going to have to pay more in taxes.

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So the government is saying that this is going to be good for the taxpayer because the government is giving you a tax break on the income tax side, on one end, and it's going to offset the losses that you're going to get on the HST on the other side. I don't buy that for a second,

because the reality is that consumers have certain expenditures that they must make, such as paying rent, heating the house, paying the telephone, paying for services at your house, buying goods in order to keep things going in your home etc., all of which are going to be subject to this new HST. And at the end of the day, whatever you get in tax savings on the income tax side is, for most people, going to mean that they're going to actually be getting less because they're going to end up paying more on the HST side.

When it comes to business, it's much the same story. I've had a chance to talk to a number of insurance brokers in my riding who have talked to me about this particular issue and have said, "You know what's going to happen? We're going to end up having to charge HST on items that were not applied before, especially on financial products. What's going to end up happening is that the person who is buying the product is going to get mad at us, and we're not the ones that are increasing the costs." So they're concerned that they're going to be catching a lot more flak from the consumers that are buying their products as a result of having to pay more taxes, and, quite frankly, they don't see it as fair that people should have to pay this additional tax.

To people working in the real estate business, it's the same thing. I have had a chance to talk to a number of real estate agents across my riding, and I've been in contact here because of the lobbying that has gone on around Queen's Park from the realtors. It's the same thing with them. They're saying that all kinds of things now will be applicable to the new HST that weren't applicable before, and at the end of the day, it's going to cost the consumer more money.

The government's saying, "Don't worry. We're going to exempt houses up to a certain amount," but you're going to have to pay on a whole bunch of things: your legal fees, your land transfer tax. All of that kind of stuff is going to be subject to the HST—things that you haven't had to pay before. As you know, many of the real estate fees, for example, are based on a percentage of the sale of the house. So if there's a 6% realtor's fee on a $100,000 or a $200,000 or a $1-million home, you're going to have to pay an additional 8% to that realtor as a result because of the taxes that are going to be charged. The question becomes, who's going to pay for that? The realtors sure as heck don't want to, so it's going to be the consumer. So for the government to say that somehow or other the consumers are ahead with this thing—completely the wrong thing.

The moving business: I was talking earlier about Lloyd Richards, who runs Lloyd Richards Moving and Cartage, up in Timmins. Everybody who knows Lloyd knows that he is not shy for words, I guess is the way I would put it for Lloyd. He is apoplectic about this, because he's saying, "I'm going to have to charge HST on the services that I provide to the customers that I service, and it's an additional 8%." He says, "I don't want to have to pass on an additional cost to my customers at this particularly difficult economic time." He says, "This is really a recipe for disaster." And as Lloyd would say, what's the matter with McGuinty? I ask myself the same question. What is the Premier thinking about, in the middle of a recession, introducing such a tax that really could end up becoming, I believe, a damper on the economy?

It's much the same debate as we saw under Mulroney when he did the GST with Finance Minister Wilson. Wilson at the time introduced the GST in the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney. The same arguments were made on the government side of the bench. It was going to be a real boon for Ontario and Canada. As a result, we now pay more taxes than we've had to before, the savings have not been passed on to consumers, and the Tories went from a majority government down to two seats.

I think you guys on the other side should start ringing the bell and recognize that this is not exactly a political winner. This is something that people are going to remember each and every time they go to purchase a service or buy goods somewhere in Ontario. It's going to be: "Mulroney"—excuse me, McGuinty—"made me pay what? How come I'm having"—well, it's Mulroney or McGuinty; it's kind of the same thing, right? But in the end—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, it is. You guys are like buddies when it comes to this issue, right? There have been successive governments since Mulroney that have refused to implement the HST in Ontario. I was a member of a government that said no. The Conservatives were a government for two terms that said no. We had a choice in Ontario, and we decided not to because we thought it was a bad idea.

The last point, because I've only got about a minute before the House recesses for question period, is the issue of point-of-sale exemption. Here in Ontario, we're going to give up the ability to determine retail sales tax policy. For First Nations, that's an issue because they now have a point-of-sale exemption on PST but not on HST. So that means that now, whenever First Nations go to buy goods and show up with their status cards, they're going to be paying the full amount.

Some people might think that's a great thing, because I know the debate around this issue, but I can tell you that for First Nations, it's a problem. Go live in Attawapiskat, go live in Fort Albany and tell me if you can afford to pay an additional 8% on any goods you buy, because quite frankly, things there are far more expensive, and even if you get on Air Quebec and fly down to Timmins or Sudbury or North Bay to buy something—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30. At such time, we will have question period.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to introduce page Nicolas McWatters' guests, his family sitting over in the members' gallery: Kathy McWatters, Gord McWatters and the grandmother, Loredana Semenzin. We're delighted to have them here, as we're delighted to have him here.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Good morning. I want to introduce a good friend and neighbour of mine from my riding, Rick Attridge, who's in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park, Rick.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to welcome youth from the Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation. They are here today in Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to welcome the mother of page Jamie Sheidow. Lori Sheidow is going to be joining us today. Welcome, Lori.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to welcome Gail Ballard from my riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Gail, welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Premier, Anzen Consulting submitted two separate bids for an eHealth contract in what was supposed to be a competitive tendering process. Ordinarily, this disqualifies both bids, but the McGuinty government still managed to hand Liberal-friendly Anzen the deal. Premier, why is it that even when you tender a contract, your Liberal friends will still end up with the deal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to talk about our response to the Auditor General's report. As the member opposite knows, the Auditor General raised some important issues. We have responded to those issues. We have made significant changes in our procurement policy, but we're moving ahead with eHealth. EHealth is an extremely important initiative of this government and of governments around the world. We take the Auditor General's findings extremely seriously. The board of eHealth went above and beyond the call of duty and got independent legal advice to further explore some of the situations raised in the Auditor General's report, and I was very happy to share those letters the day before yesterday.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Back to the Anzen contract, which was the subject of my question: There was a legal opinion obtained by eHealth with respect to some inappropriate practices, which we have obtained. The legal opinion notes that Mr. Patrick Lo, who is the acting VP of security of eHealth, was instructed by Mr. Allaudin Merali, then eHealth Ontario's senior vice-president of corporate services and privacy, to telephone Anzen Consulting Inc. to ask Anzen to resubmit its proposal at a lower price. Premier, can you explain how this is possibly acceptable in a competitive tendering process?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In fact, it is not an acceptable practice. The Auditor General raised the issue. We have responded to the issue. It is not an acceptable practice, and eHealth got independent legal advice to confirm that it was in fact not a criminal issue but it certainly wasn't an appropriate practice and one that we are absolutely committed to having learned from.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The legal opinion which we obtained raises more questions than answers and certainly does not dispose of this issue. That's precisely why we need an independent public inquiry. The legal opinion mentions this obvious breach of the competitive bidding process but fails to deal with the ramifications of it.

Why did Mr. Merali give the instructions that he did? Who else did he speak to? Did anyone else know that the competitive bidding process was not being followed? All of these point to the need to ask serious questions that Ontarians deserve answers to. So my question is: Based on this new information, will the Premier do the right thing and finally call the public inquiry so that the people of Ontario will know what really happened?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Peterborough will watch his comments, please.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows full well that this was a situation that took place prior to the Auditor General reporting on eHealth. We have learned from that. We welcomed the Auditor General's recommendations and have acted on every single one of them. This will not happen again. It should never have happened, and we have put in place the right safeguards to ensure that it does not happen again.

We're moving forward on eHealth. It's critically important to the sustainability of our health care system that we have electronic health records, electronic medical records. It's the way of the future, and we on this side of the House are committed to moving forward, having learned the lessons we have learned, to bring eHealth to this province.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Given this government's track record of awarding contracts under suspect circumstances at the Ministry of Health, we now learn that the Ministry of Transportation has been engaged in its own questionable contracting practices.

Two major contracts were put out to public tender. The ministry ignored its own tender conditions and awarded the contracts to companies which were clearly non-compliant with the tender process. In both cases the matter was appealed to the courts and in both cases the

court ruled, "MTO failed to fulfill its duty of fairness to all bidders." I want to know from the Premier: Why were these awards made when it was very clear that the conditions of the tender were not met, and why, after the Premier committed to an open and fair tendering process, are these continuing to happen in this government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I don't know what contract the member would be talking about in this particular case, because the contracts I'm aware of have been—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is this the new voice of the Conservative Party over here, constantly nattering on that side?

The member has a serious question and a good question. He always asks in an appropriate manner. I'd be interested in further detail, because I'm not aware of a contract that would be in the manner which the member has described. The contracts that we're involved in are free, open and transparent. If the member would give me some detail, I'll be able to help him out, I think, in some subsequent answers to the supplementaries. He addresses a good question, all the time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm surprised that the Minister of Transportation would not be aware of two major contracts which were referred to the courts to be resolved.

One of those contracts was worth $20 million. It was awarded to Thomas Cavanagh Construction Ltd., even though its bid was non-compliant with specifications of MTO's tender contracts. It took an appeal to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice to have the award of this contract quashed. Again, I repeat the words of the judges in this matter: "MTO failed to fulfill its duty of fairness to all bidders." It ordered that the award of that $20-million contract be quashed. I would like to know from the minister: Why does this practice continue in his ministry, and who will be held to account for these decisions?

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Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to be able to help the member more. I think the way he's described it—and to be fair to him, I think he asks good and relevant questions in this House. Is this matter—the member can help me out with this—still before the courts? Is there an appeal going on at the present time? Because normally, we're unable to discuss those if they are before the courts. But I'm very interested in what the member has to say.

I can tell him that as a result of the auditor's recommendations, for instance, there is a situation where the Premier has prescribed that all contracts go through an appropriate procedure which is an accepted procedure. Under my mandate, that is what I am supposed to follow.

I'm very interested in what the member has to say. He can help me out and tell me whether the court proceedings have been completed at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: It's not up to me to brief the minister.

What I would like to know from the minister is whether or not he will commit now to the House to research not only this particular contract but the second contract, which his staff will be prepared to brief him on, and tell us today whether he will hold people in his ministry accountable, or will he be complicit by explaining this away in the same way that it has been done at the Ministry of Health?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I have a note that says there's one. Highway 417 at Arnprior is before the courts at the present time.

There are a number of these that go to court when people who are not successful in them decide to go to court because they're dissatisfied with the manner in which this has happened. Then the court makes its rulings.

Of course, I am prepared to look at all of these that have some history to them, but I can assure the member that at this time our policy is to have a free and open process. Oftentimes we'll employ a third person, as you know, who is a referee, I guess the word would be, who looks at it from some distance and makes sure that it's compliant with all government policies.

I would be delighted to continue this conversation with the member tomorrow.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. As the holidays get closer, Ontario families are wondering how they're going to make ends meet during these tough economic times. But the only gift that they can expect from the McGuinty government is a new tax that's going to make life more expensive, a new tax that's being rammed through this Legislature before the end of the year, even though the House of Commons won't be debating it until next year.

My question is a simple one. Why the urgency? To the Premier: Why the urgency?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague is nothing if not consistent in terms of not sharing the good news with the people of Ontario about their tax cuts. She knows that the package of tax reforms, yes, does include the harmonization of the provincial tax and the goods and services tax, but it also provides for a tax cut.

Were it within our power, we'd deliver that tax cut for Christmas, but we can't. We'll have to wait until the new year, the very beginning of the new year. With the able assistance of my honourable colleague, I know that we will have this matter completed before the House rises at the end of this year, to ensure that Ontarians can benefit from their tax cut, beginning on January 1, 2010.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Liberal government likes to pretend that it can just ignore the growing political storm that's brewing in Ottawa over the HST. The Premier is betting that the federal HST legislation will sail

through the minority Parliament. But his friend, Michael Ignatieff, is holding a trump card that he refuses to reveal.

Will the Premier provide some clarity and tell the people of Ontario: Does he have Mr. Ignatieff's support or not?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't say anything other than I am very confident that the government of Canada will honour the wishes of the people of Ontario, as expressed by their duly elected Parliament, their Legislature and their government.

We are going to continue to debate this bill. There's going to be another vote. I expect that the result will be respected by the people of Canada, as expressed through the government of Canada. I have that confidence, and I'm sure that my honourable colleague does as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier doesn't like to talk about the tough decisions his friends in Ottawa will need to make about the HST, and I understand that. Could it be because his federal Liberal cousins are listening to their constituents and getting cold feet about supporting a tax that the people simply don't want?

The Premier knows that without federal legislation, Ontario won't see a dime of the transition funding to implement the HST. Given that it's anybody's guess whether or not the federal HST bill will survive this minority Parliament, will the Premier commit today to shelving his plans for the HST if the House of Commons refuses to support it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll tell you why we have such continuing confidence and faith in our members of Parliament, from all political parties, to do the right thing in the circumstances: because what we're talking about is 600,000 more jobs for the people of Ontario, we're talking about $47 billion more by way of investment in new business, and we're talking about increases of income of up to 9% more as a result of our package of tax reforms.

I think members of Parliament in the House of Commons understand that Ontario in particular has suffered greatly. Our families and communities have suffered greatly as a result of this global economic downturn. They know that we need to take strong action. They know that we need to be rather dramatic in terms of the reforms that we put in place. They know that we've given long and hard thought to what needs to be done, so I'm confident that we'll have their support, as I say, to create those 600,000 jobs for the people of Ontario.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier may have faith in that. I wonder if he also has faith in Santa Claus bringing him a good gift this Christmas.

My next question is to the Premier. The Premier insists that prices are going to go down—

Hon. Christopher Bentley: There are children watching. Leave Santa alone.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There may be children watching, but children would not be acting the way some of you are acting right now.

Interjection: Does the Speaker have a list?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Speaker does have a list, and he has been checking who is naughty or nice.

Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier insists that prices are going to go down with the introduction of the harmonized sales tax, but yesterday he insisted that electricity prices are going to continue to rise. Would he like to correct the record and announce hydro rate cuts, or is he admitting that life is actually going to get a heck of a lot more expensive with the harmonized sales tax?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: First, let me say that, yes, Andrea, there is a Santa Claus, just so that we're clear on the record; I want to remove any doubt. I had hoped that was an issue that was beyond debate, for which there is a global consensus.

What I indicated yesterday was that, notwithstanding the fact that electricity prices have been frozen for five years in the province of Ontario, and we're very proud of that, over the course of the next several years—in fact, over the course of the next 10 years, when our package of tax reforms creates nearly 600,000 more jobs—it is likely that the price of milk will go up, the price of gasoline will go up, the price of electricity will go up and rents will go up. That's just what happens over the course of an extended period of time, and I think Ontarians understand that. But most importantly, in terms of hope, they can count on 600,000 more jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everyday people are writing to me and to the Premier about the impact of higher electricity prices and what that's going to mean for them and their families.

Grant Fraser writes this: "Adding this tax to necessities such as hydro is completely without reason, or caring about the citizens of Ontario...."

Pam Ross of Exeter writes this: "Hydro One has already increased their rates so much.... The cost of living has already increased enough and our wages are not increasing."

More of the tax burden is being shifted onto everyday people. If the HST is supposed to lower prices, why is this Premier not announcing hydro rate cuts?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think what my honourable colleague is asking for is, in the circumstances, unreasonable. She is asking that we cut the cost of electricity. I think we've done the next best thing: We've held those rates steady for five continuing years. We think that's pretty important. I think it's a significant achievement and a real accomplishment.

Again, I would remind the honourable member that in addition to the harmonization of the provincial sales tax

and the federal goods and services tax—something that has long been called for by her party, this party and economists generally—we are cutting income taxes for the people of Ontario. Ninety-three per cent of the people of Ontario are going to have a permanent income tax cut. We're taking 90,000 Ontarians at the low-income level off the tax rolls forever.

So there is a balanced approach that we're bringing. In addition to holding those electricity rates steady for five years, we're now going to cut people's income taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Sharol from northwestern Ontario puts it very simply: "This HST will put a lot of hardship on the people from this area who are already having a tough time due to the mill closures, high electricity bills, high prices at the grocery stores ... and it appears to me that this Liberal government just doesn't give a damn."

Can the Premier explain to Sharol and other Ontarians like her how an 8% tax on electricity is going to make her life more affordable?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague made reference to mill closures. My sense is that the individual who wrote to the leader of the NDP would not have sent that letter were the mill open today.

This is about jobs. It's about 600,000 more jobs for the people of Ontario. It's creating those economic conditions that lead businesses to expand, to make further investments in machinery and equipment and in people. That's what this is all about.

When they put harmonized sales taxes in place in the Maritimes, that led to a 12% increase on the part of business in new equipment, new machinery and new jobs.

This is all about creating more jobs. We've had a very strong consensus.

If the opposite parties were to check their records, they would see that on many separate instances in the past, they've been very much in favour of the kind of tax reforms that we're putting in place. I'd ask for their support once again, this time in a more public way, as we move forward to create 600,000 jobs for Ontarians.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Transportation: A company named Coco Paving received contracts for construction and repair of Highway 402, despite being submitted after the competitive bidding process was closed. It's more than a little odd that staff who are very accustomed with processing bids would make such a flagrant breach of tendering law. I want to know from the minister why his ministry awarded this contract, knowing that it did not comply with the tender terms of his ministry.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As you would know, the ministry evaluates all of the bids that are put in. These are ministry officials who have some long experience in the development of highways in the province of Ontario, or the repair or expansion of highways. They do an evaluation according to the materials that are provided and many different circumstances. These are public servants who have done this—when you were the minister, when my good friend Norm Sterling was minister, when everybody was a minister. They look at all of the bids that are put forward. Sometimes it's the content of the steel, for instance—whether there's Canadian content or no Canadian content—and these officials make the decision on that basis. There are, from time to time, companies that will go to court to challenge this. That is their right.

In the Highway 417 situation, that is still before the courts. These companies have that right to go before the courts, and when the courts make a determination, the ministry will comply—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: This matter, too, was referred to the courts because it was such a flagrant breaking of tendering law. I would suggest to the minister that his staff knew full well that this bid came in after the closing of the bid.

What is interesting is that Coco Paving went from receiving $1.6 million of work from the province in 2002 to $113 million last year. Did the fact that Jenny Coco is a big donor to the McGuinty Liberals and that she is a former president of a Windsor riding association for the Liberal Party have anything to do with the faulty decision that was obviously made by the Ministry of Transportation?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment of impugning motive.

Mr. Frank Klees: I withdraw that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's the old story of the opposition: They state it and then they withdraw it, and of course it's out there on the record for people to hear.

I can assure the member that when the ministry is letting contracts, the ministry goes through the procedure that it has. It's entirely done by the ministry officials, who are civil servants who have served under your government, under the NDP and under Liberal governments. They make the determination, they make the recommendations, as to which contracts shall be awarded. They do not take into consideration any of the material that the member has mentioned in his supplementary at all. These are fine public servants who over the years have served your party when you were in power, the Liberals and the NDP when they were in power. Companies that are unsatisfied with the procedure have the opportunity to go to court, and do, and the ministry complies with the court rulings.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. After the first seven months of the Second Career program in

2008, only 1,100 unemployed workers were enrolled in the program. Under pressure from the NDP, you changed the rules and you got more people. Last summer you said, "Holy cow, what are we going to do with all these people?" And so instead of dealing positively with all the new applicants and the greater number of applicants you had, you decided to reduce the number of applicants.

Minister, why have you decided to return to the bad old days when Second Career was just a token program?

Hon. John Milloy: It's unfortunate that I only have a minute or two to correct the record on what the member brought forward.

I'm very proud that our government brought forward a training program to help unemployed individuals who were looking to pursue long-term training in a college or a private career college. We set up a program for 20,000 spaces over three years. After approximately 15 months, we could report to the Legislature and to the people of Ontario that we had 21,000 people come forward. This government, under the leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Finance, made a decision that instead of declaring victory and moving on, we were going to continue this program.

Over the last number of months we have continued to accept individuals into the Second Career program on a limited basis, and just recently, about 10 days ago, we brought forward a new framework for the program under which we are assessing applicants that have come forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I read on the Second Career website where it says, in answer to the question: "Do the new guidelines mean fewer people will be able to receive Second Career support?" "Yes," says the website. And also the website says—his, not mine—"Participants may be asked to make a greater contribution to their training, depending on their financial situation." I wish I had more time to read more from the website, and I don't.

All the analysts agree that there can be no complete recovery while unemployment hovers at around 9%. You have qualified applicants and you have spaces. Why would you limit access to a job creation program that you claim is working? Do you not want Ontarians working and contributing to the economy?

Hon. John Milloy: We welcomed 21,000 people into the Second Career program, and a little over a week ago we announced our plans to welcome 8,000 more people into Ontario government training programs. I am not going to apologize for a program that he stood up and made fun of day after day.

At the end of this program we will have 29,000 people in training in the province of Ontario, preparing themselves for new careers, preparing themselves to move forward in an economy that is under transformation.

I am proud of the leadership of this government; I am proud that we have been able to reach out to almost 30,000 people to make sure that they have the retraining opportunities that they need.

VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. A recent column in the Toronto Star speaks about the future of volunteerism and the lack of opportunities that will be present for baby boomers upon retirement. According to the column, in just over a year, Canada will start experiencing the largest wave of retirement in its history. There is concern that organizations don't have the infrastructure to manage volunteers. They are currently facing difficulties with orienting, training and integrating volunteers.

We're all aware of the economic and social benefits of volunteering, and baby boomers have so much to contribute. It's Ontario that stands to gain from their contributions. What does the minister intend on doing to assist the non-profit sector to keep volunteerism both strong and viable here in Ontario?

1100

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Oak Ridges–Markham for her question. John F. Kennedy once said famously, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." After all these long years, it is still relevant in the lives of the five million Ontarians who volunteer and give so much to this province day in and day out. We understand their level of commitment. This is why we have helped hundreds of volunteer organizations through 60 partnership projects to retain and manage volunteers.

I'm proud to say that Ontario is a better place because of our volunteers, and we are here to support them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Active citizenship and volunteerism is at the core of our way of life in Ontario. Ontarians who are actively engaged in the public life of the community have a positive impact on the quality of life and on our economic and social well-being. Communities across Ontario depend heavily on volunteers.

Governments of all levels need to support these individuals and organizations to ensure that there are necessary resources available to welcome volunteers with open arms. However, in order to further volunteerism to thrive at its highest levels, we also need to recognize volunteers and commemorate their outstanding work in our communities.

What is the government doing to ensure that these remarkable citizens are getting the recognition and appreciation they truly deserve?

Hon. Michael Chan: Our government recognizes outstanding citizens for their accomplishments through the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship. Recognition applauds both commitment and hard work. It also becomes a symbol of inspiration for many to follow.

The Lieutenant Governor recently honoured 11 such outstanding individuals. Among them was Bilaal Rajan. One of many accomplishments was fundraising more than $5 million. He is only 13 years old. Another individual, Barbara Edwards, has served as a foster home mother for 63 years. She continues to provide a loving

home for children in need. Ontario has many wonderful volunteers, and we are proud of them.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. Two weeks ago, a company by the name of Coco Paving played host to a tour stop for your so-called HST consultations. Jenny Coco, the CEO of Coco Paving, is a past president of the Windsor West Liberal Riding Association and also a big donor to the McGuinty Liberals.

Premier, how many other so-called consultations were set up by big Liberal donors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That is, in fact, the case; in fact, Ms. Coco was the past president of the Windsor West Federal Liberal Association, that's absolutely correct. Like a number of other business people and like people like Jim Flaherty who have been speaking out in public in favour of the harmonized sales tax, this government will continue to advocate on behalf of the tax reform package we brought forward.

It will create some 600,000 new jobs and it is the right plan for Ontario. It is the right plan. It is the right plan going forward to strengthen this economy so that people in Ontario can find work as we come out of this recession and we can grow a better and stronger, more prosperous economy for the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: To the Premier: If it's the right plan for Ontario, why don't you proudly go around the province and listen to the people of Ontario?

This isn't the first time Coco Paving helped you orchestrate so-called consultations; you did the same thing in Sudbury. But according to Northern Ontario Business, what you call consultation was nothing more than "a press conference in Sudbury."

Premier, will you give up these sham consultations and commit to holding real public hearings on the HST?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Ontario Road Builders' Association, I can assure you, has a lot of Conservative representatives, including Ms. Coco, and that's who sponsored that forum. My goodness.

I did find some interesting quotes here that I thought I would share with the House in terms of other people. Here's what the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills said, and this is in Hansard: "The Ontario government should harmonize its provincial sales tax with the federal goods and services tax." And here's what the same member said in standing committee: "I think that a good statement would be that the committee now agrees with the Conservative position in a minority report two years ago, that we combine the GST and the PST."

You can cast aspersions against Ontario road builders, people who create jobs, people who act fairly. You shouldn't do that. We are having a debate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

COMPOSTING

M^me^ France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des soins de longue durée. The McGuinty government is proposing to allow composting companies to mix sewage sludge—which is full of toxics, heavy metals, PCBs and disease pathogens—into its compost. There will be no restriction as to where this compost is spread or how it can be distributed. Since companies get paid to dispose of sewage sludge, they will add the highest allowable level of toxic material to our compost, which will find its way to our farms, our backyard gardens and our parks, and also find its way into our water and our food.

My question is, has the minister explored the potential health and disease implications of this deregulation of compost?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to thank the member for the question, and I certainly will raise it with the Minister of the Environment at my earliest opportunity.

I can assure the member opposite that the health of Ontarians is of paramount importance to this government, and that's why we've moved forward on many initiatives to protect their health. I would much rather protect Ontarians' health than treat them once they become ill. I know that's a philosophy shared by all members of this House. So as we move to reduce toxins in our environment, we have banned pesticides. We are continuing to improve the health of Ontarians. It's critical to the sustainability of our health care system and, more importantly, to the health of Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: There have been constituents from the village of Vernon who have contacted the minister and asked her to take action to put a moratorium in place. Sewage sludge is becoming more and more toxic. The US Environmental Protection Agency found pharmaceutical products, steroids and flame retardants in sludge. That's in addition to the heavy metals, the bacteria, the viruses and the allergens we all find in this. A study has found that sickness from airborne pathogens now can be found up to a kilometre downwind from the sludge-spreading area. Yet the government still does not collect information about sludge-related health complaints.

Once the water we drink, the food we eat and the air we breathe has been contaminated, it will be too late. Why won't the minister call for an immediate moratorium on sludge spreading until we know that it is safe?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said earlier, I will raise the issue with the Minister of the Environment. What I can tell you is that the composting and green bin programs are a very important part of our waste diversion program. Organics make up about a third of our waste. We know there have been some challenges and that there is work to be done. We want to do more to encourage organics diversion, and we want to make sure we do it right. That's why we're proposing new standards that would ensure that compost is produced and used in Ontario in a manner that protects the environment and public health.

The new guideline includes best practices for compost facilities, as well as new categories for compost material, and there will be different categories for material and appropriate standards. Our proposal is encouraging more composting while ensuring that it's done in a manner that protects our people, our communities and our environment.

1110

TAXATION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Revenue. We've once again heard allegations that there has not been enough public consultation and debate regarding the harmonized sales tax. But it has been my experience that since the budget was introduced, Ontarians in every corner of the province have been fully able to voice their concerns and discuss tax reform with their MPPs, which we also hear about in this chamber.

Each member of the opposition and the third party has spoken at length in opposition to our tax cuts and job creation, but important debate on this issue continues to be delayed. As the leader of the third party has said, "I would put my requests to Mr. Hudak and ask him to actually stop playing the silly games."

Minister, can you tell us how you are conducting the public debate and consultation on the HST?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to my friend that of course I've been fortunate to have many, many invitations from right across Ontario. I think I've done well over three dozen of these consultations across the province. I've made sure that I've been able to get to every corner of Ontario, and I have been able to go into parts of Ontario that are represented by those opposite.

For example, on September 25 I met with the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce in the riding of Kenora–Rainy River. As a matter of fact, I believe the member for Kenora–Rainy River was there. I saw him there. On September 30 I met with the Simcoe and District Chamber of Commerce in the riding of Haldimand–Norfolk. On October 20 I spoke at the Wasaga Beach Mayor's Breakfast, organized by the chamber of commerce in the riding of Simcoe–Grey. I know my good friend from Simcoe–Grey wasn't able to be there, but when I was introduced by a friend of his, he wanted everybody to know that he thought that I was a pretty good guy. I really appreciate the member from Simcoe–Grey passing that along.

But at every one of those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Those opposed to the HST and our package that will cut taxes and create jobs have been actively fear-mongering and spreading mistruths. Some of the common false arguments that they present include: that the HST is an excuse for producers and service providers to gouge consumers; that the HST will raise costs for small businesses; that the HST will hurt lower-income Ontarians; that the HST is just a tax grab; that the HST isn't business-friendly; and that the HST should be delayed until the recovery is underway.

Minister, these are serious claims that have Ontarians very concerned. Could the minister please address these claims? Is anyone going to be hurt by the HST?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would say to all members that Roger Martin, the dean of the Rotman School of Management, and James Milway, the executive director of research at the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, authored an article in today's Globe and Mail entitled "Debunking Myths about the HST." And what do they tell us about these claims that are being made? Well, first of all it says:

—"the experience in Quebec and Atlantic Canada was that market forces pressured" companies "to pass on their savings to consumers";

—"the costs for small businesses ... will decrease, because they will no longer have to pay" PST on their inputs;

—"the tax reform package provides for sales tax credits aimed" specifically "at lower-income Ontarians";

—"the province is reducing"—oh—"personal and corporate income taxes and providing tax credits to help compensate for higher sales taxes paid by lower-income Ontarians"; and

—"the HST is Ontario-friendly."

A recent study done by tax expert Dr. Jack Mintz says that the tax reform will estimate some 591,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: A question to the Premier: The Caledonia standoff is in its 1,367th day. Three and a half years ago—on May 9, 2006, to be exact—I stood in this House and I warned you about the breach of security with respect to the power system in Caledonia. Just two weeks later the lights went out.

Three and a half years ago the Niagara-to-Caledonia hydro tower project was ground to a halt by militants. Premier, what headway have you made since 2006 with respect to keeping this power tower project moving forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We know it's a very difficult and very challenging situation in that part of the province. We know that emotions in these situations can run very high. We have a number of different agencies, the police, working with the community, working very hard with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and his officials to try and not only defuse situations but to try and ensure the long-term resolution of this, which, of course, at the end of the day, involves a federal land claim where we need a long-term federal solution and assistance on this area. I'll be pleased to refer—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Look, it's been three and a half years. We've had trestles from these power towers being used as blockades. This Niagara reinforcement project is massive. It runs the length of the Niagara peninsula, from the Allanburg transfer station at Thorold up to the Caledonia transfer station and beyond to Middleport—800 megawatts of transmission capacity. I'm told that it was meant to serve 300,000 people, but we've had Mohawk warriors on top of these towers, not Hydro One workers.

Premier, or various ministers: After three and a half years, just how much longer will this project be blockaded?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's a very difficult situation, but it's not just been three and a half years; it's been 200 years. If there's a 200-year-old dispute, and the federal government has jurisdiction over land claims, I know my friend would want to join us, would want to ask the federal government to become as engaged as we are, and get to the table as we are. Assist us in finding the resolution that all of the residents in that area, and in the province of Ontario, want. It's a very challenging issue—three and a half years, my friend refers to, and the other 196 and a half that this issue has actually been alive. It's time for all to come to the table in good faith and find the way forward.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The number of Ontarians receiving out-of-country medical treatment is skyrocketing. An investigation by the Metroland newspaper chain found that OHIP approvals for out-of-country care have risen 450% in the last eight years—and so have this government's contracts with American health providers.

My question is, will the Premier explain why there has been such a dramatic increase in out-of-country care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is absolutely right: There has been a dramatic increase in out-of-country health care provided and covered through OHIP. We are very focused on bringing that number back down.

I'd like to talk about one of the big investments that we have made, and actually, it's headed by a renowned physician from Hamilton. We're investing $75 million to provide in-country, in-Ontario, bariatric surgery. We currently spend significant amounts of money sending people outside of Ontario for that bariatric surgery. We can do it for less money and we can provide the service right here in Ontario, where we can also provide the follow-up support that people need after they've had that surgery.

We're committed to bringing back down the number of dollars that we spend out-of-country. That's just one example. I'll have others in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that Ontarians are facing cuts to their local hospitals—to beds, to staff, to services, and even entire emergency rooms. Patients are losing access to local care as the McGuinty government shells out more money to private American providers. Rather than sending more and more Ontarians out-of-country for medical basics like MRIs and CT scans, why isn't this government investing more money to improve services for a greater number of Ontarians right here at home?

1120

Hon. Deborah Matthews: If the member had listened to my answer to the first question, she'd understand that we are investing a lot more here, not just in programs that were previously covered out-of-country, but in the full range of health care services. By any measure, health care is significantly better now than it was when we took office in 2003.

One of the other areas where we have seen tremendous growth in out-of-country expenditures is in the area of genetic testing. We are working on a plan to repatriate genetic testing back to Ontario—the five most common forms of genetic testing we think can be done right here in Ontario. The new program is expected to be up and running within the next several months, sometime in 2010.

Another area where we've made great investments is in new cancer care and drug treatments, which will save taxpayers some $15 million in out-of-country expenses. There's more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, here in Ontario, enrolment at our post-secondary institutions is growing. More and more people are choosing to go on to college, university or an apprenticeship, and they are choosing Ontario schools.

In my community, the University of Guelph has seen a tremendous amount of growth over the past four years, and I know that this is the case for most institutions across the province. Although this is welcome news, there is no doubt that it is creating additional pressure on our universities.

We are all aware of the studies that cite the need for a highly educated, highly skilled workforce to compete in the new knowledge-based economy. In fact, it is estimated that 70% of future jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. Minister, what are you doing to assist universities so that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question, which I think is very appropriate considering the fact that we have representatives from the Council of Ontario Universities here with us at Queen's Park today, and I know that all members want to welcome them as they undertake meetings with various MPPs.

The honourable member is quite right: Since 2003, we have seen a tremendous increase in post-secondary education of about 100,000 more students; 84,000 of them have been in Ontario's universities, and I've been very proud of the support that our government has offered these institutions. Since 2003, operating funding for universities has increased by 64%, while at the same time we have significantly increased per-student funding.

I was very pleased that the most recent budget contained an additional $150 million to help our colleges and universities alleviate growth pressures. At the same time, over the course of the summer we rolled out $1.5 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Recently, we've heard a lot about the green economy and what that will mean for the future of Ontario. I understand that Ontario universities are pledging to do even more in the future to engage in best practices in all areas of sustainability on their campuses.

Our universities play a key role in promoting sustainable practices, integrating sustainability concepts into teaching and research, and going greener right across their operations. In fact, at the University of Guelph, students even voted to support energy conservation retrofits through a charge on their student fees; I have a very green campus. And universities across Ontario are conducting research that will not only help us tackle climate change, but create businesses and jobs that will make Ontario a global leader in this high-demand sector.

Speaker, through you to the minister: How is the government helping Ontario universities fulfill this green commitment?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to congratulate the leadership shown by both the administration and students at Ontario's universities, and to just give a few examples of how we're partnering with them to make sure they can continue to put forward the green agenda.

I mentioned in my first answer the $1.5-billion knowledge infrastructure program. Let me give you a few green examples from that capital program. Through KIP, the University of Guelph, to cite just one example, will develop a local environmental cluster, and at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, a $45-million investment will help build the energy systems and nuclear science research centre. In addition, the Ministry of the Environment is providing $800,000 annually for three research environmental chairs. Two chairs in green chemistry and green engineering will focus on emerging fields of science that aim to develop greener approaches and processes—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Minister of Community Safety: The growing scourge of human trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable young women in this province is a human tragedy and a societal issue that must be confronted. All too frequently we learn of young, vulnerable women being lured to Canada by organized crime groups with false employment promises, or smuggled across our border, and then mercilessly exploited for profit. Minister, this is a unique crime calling for a unique response that recognizes the special circumstances of victims.

Tamara Cherry of the Sun newspaper chain has documented these cases across the country. Just three weeks ago she detailed that of the six provinces analyzed, only one, Ontario, had no special program in place to deal with human trafficking. Minister, what possible explanation do you have for ignoring this growing problem?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Well, the exact opposite is in fact the truth. The member outlines a very real problem, but what he says that is incorrect—or not perfectly accurate, I should say—is that we are ignoring the problem. He's saying that the Ontario Provincial Police and police services across Ontario are ignoring this problem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our Ontario Provincial Police service and municipal police services across the province are in very active discussion and deployment of many different techniques to ensure we do all that we can to eliminate this very vile act and crime.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The member may object to one word that I used, but the reality is that the analysis showed that Ontario, of the provinces analyzed, is the only province without a special program. Minister, human trafficking will continue to ruin lives and negatively affect communities while you and your government take your Caledonia look-the-other-way approach. There was a time years ago, when you sat over here, when the sexual abuse of young women moved you to propose measures to rescue victims from exploitation. That's the kind of can-do approach we have to see today.

Minister, will you commit to reviewing actions taken by other jurisdictions involving police, immigration, victim services and community groups to help rescue the victims of human trafficking, and to take action to ensure the full force of the law is brought to bear against those who exploit them?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There's absolutely no question that we are constantly looking at ways of ensuring that community safety is enhanced.

With reference to my life over in opposition, we formed the government and we established a ministry responsible for children and youth services, something the previous government refused to do.

I do take exception again to him even proposing in his innocuous way that the OPP are ignoring this issue. The OPP, municipal police services—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member from Leeds–Grenville to withdraw that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's accurate, but I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): He withdrew the comment.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: You didn't hear what he said before, but that's all right. It doesn't make any difference, because I'll stand behind our police services across the province of Ontario any day. I'll stand behind their interaction with Canadian Border Services and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I'll stand behind the unique and original approaches that they're using to combat this crime, any day and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today to ask the minister responsible for women's issues a question about violence against women. According to the government's own data, eight out of 10 victims of spousal abuse are women, and in order to escape violence, women are using temporary support shelters in record numbers, with over 30,000 women and children in shelters in 2008. Later today, Ontario women's shelters will be asking for a written commitment to end violence against women. Since the women's directorate wasn't mentioned in the 2009 budget, is this government prepared to make the investments necessary to make this commitment?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity in this House to speak about this government's commitment to protecting women and children. That commitment comes from the highest levels. As you might know, this is an area that I have worked on for more than 25 years. I was very pleased a number of years ago to be able to lead the consultations on the government's domestic violence action plan, and that action plan is why we are now investing more than $208 million this year to protect women from violence and to support victims of abuse. This includes $87 million for the domestic violence action plan and $18.8 million in investments in women's shelters.

We've made a lot of progress, but we are not naive to the realities of women's lives across this province. We know there is more work to do, and we're committed to doing that work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The truth is that this government is not addressing women's economic independence. In Ontario, women earn 71 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Over a lifetime, this pay gap adds up to astonishing financial losses for women, ranging from $700,000 to $2 million, depending on levels of education. Because this government underfunds the Pay Equity Commission, neglects child care, and is not raising the living standards of women, they are left in a financial trap and vulnerable to domestic violence.

Minister, when will this government address these serious issues facing women?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: If I had more time, I would have an opportunity to provide the member opposite with some of the details about the important work that this government has done since we were privileged to take office in 2003.

But let me just say for the moment, speaking directly to employment services, that our government is making changes to employment services and training networks,so that services are easier for women to access and use. The new employment service models will offer a one-stop shop that will put clients first.

We are working across ministries, and that is the approach we have taken since 2003, under the leadership of the Premier, bringing all ministries to the table to better protect women and their children, to give them economic independence. It is something that we focus on each and every day. It's something that I'll be privileged to talk to with the group joining us in the Legislature later today. It's work that we're proud of, it's work that we're continuing to do, and it's work that we will not stop until women are not in harm's way. That's our commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1132 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure today to welcome to the House Sharon Mousseau. She's the deputy reeve of Beckwith township in Lanark county. She's here today with a group of fine individuals. She's also with Lanark County Interval House, and is here with Interval House for their lobby day today. Thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have special guests here today, but a very special one—first of all, my grandson Nathaniel. This is Nathaniel, who's 14 months old, along with mother Julie and father Chris and mother-in-law Jackie McVeigh. Of special note, Jackie, who is a mediator with the Ontario Labour Relations Board, is retiring as of Monday, so we should thank her for her work.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have the very special honour of recognizing one of Mississauga's leading citizens: Jim Murray, who is here in the members' east gallery as my guest.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I am very delighted to introduce to you Mrs. Appoline Aldea. She's a director of the Silayan Filipino community centre. She tells me she came here especially to watch you rein in those rambunctious MPPs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I can assure your guest that I'll work very hard at reining in the member from Davenport.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to get on the record still more concerns from the people in Parry Sound–Muskoka regarding the proposed harmonized sales tax.

Theresa, a pensioner from Parry Sound, sent me a one-line e-mail: "Can't afford the hydro bills now ... this new tax will cost so much, I may lose my home. Please have a heart and stop this tax."

John of Port Carling e-mailed this:

"My wife and I are close to 64 years old, with no pension money coming our way other than early CPP.

"My wife was laid off as of [the] end of August 2009 and unable to find other employment.

"What appeared to be our living money has gone to hell in a handbasket with the decline in the financial markets in Canada. Our utility bills—as we know it now—subject to the new proposed HST would be on approximately $6,500 at 8% equals $520."

Allan, a concerned taxpayer, writes:

"I am very concerned about the upcoming HST.

"As a middle-class Canadian, I cannot afford to pay more taxes.

"With each day the Liberal government increases the burden on our shoulders. Why do we have to pay for their incompetent management of the province? As far as I can tell, the Liberals have done nothing to improve the standard of living amongst Ontarians. Rather, they have made it harder for us to survive, especially in this challenging economy.

"Please do whatever you can to put an end to this madness."

If Mr. McGuinty refuses to take hearings to our communities, then we, as legislators, must continue to bring their concerns to this House.

ROUGE VALLEY AJAX AND PICKERING HOSPITAL

Mr. Joe Dickson: This past Friday saw the opening of phase 1 of Ajax and Pickering hospital's largest expansion ever. MPP Wayne Arthurs and myself, and my wife, Donna, who is a past RN at the hospital, also attended this large gathering.

Our great staff have been treating over 40,000 emergency department patients per year in a space designed for 20,000. This new, ultra-modern emergency department is built for growth capacity to treat some 60,000 patients. It leaves one more major opening within the year coming to complete Ajax's largest hospital ever, costing approximately $100 million.

This massive redevelopment project, primarily funded by the province of Ontario, has had ongoing tremendous business and community support.

Guests included Janet Ecker, Rouge Valley Health board chair; Wayne Arthurs, our MPP for Pickering–Scarborough East; myself for Ajax–Pickering; Deborah Hammons, CEO of the Central East LHIN; John Wiersma, Rouge Valley Health Foundation chair; Gordon Simmonds, chair of Rouge Valley's Vital Links campaign; Sonia Peczeniuk, vice-president of medical affairs; and Dr. Gary Mann, chief of emergency, whose wife and family joined him on this special occasion. Our two mayors, Mayor Dave Ryan and Mayor Steve Parish, from Pickering and Ajax respectively, joined us for the photo op, and our Minister of Health was so impressed, she's going to join us tomorrow for a tour of that same hospital.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: I would like to draw your attention to frequently asked questions on the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs website. Under Douglas Creek Estates, a question is posed: Why are water and power still being supplied to the site, and who is paying for this? The answer is: "Phase 1 of the proposed Douglas Creek Estates was already serviced with water and hydro as it was under construction. For safety and health reasons, the province has kept the power and water working on the property for several months.

"The utility bills are currently being sent to the Ontario Realty Corp., as the property manager."

However, just a little while ago, the last line of that same answer read, " ... the Ontario Realty Corp. is in turn sending invoices to Six Nations band council for reimbursement." That answer had not been altered in three years, until we filed FOI 202, which asked for copies of the bills for gas, water and hydro in the possession of the ORC for the Douglas Creek Estates.

It is my opinion that this government realized we were on to them that the Ontario taxpayer had been footing the bill for utilities for all three years, not the Six Nations, even though it was suggested that that was actually the case. So instead of coming clean, Mr. McGuinty has edited his own Web page, hoping the Ontario taxpayer would not notice. My question: Is that not deceitful and misleading?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw both comments, please.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I respectfully withdraw both comments.

ORLÉANS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PEOPLE'S CHOICE BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr. Phil McNeely: Last week, the business community of Orléans celebrated its accomplishments at the seventh annual Orléans Chamber of Commerce People's Choice Business Awards. This year's program was extremely successful, with many businesses being nominated for the first time and with voting up 40% over last year.

I would like to congratulate the following award recipients selected by their peers for being the best in their field: LMNOP Toys and Games, new business of the year; Cedar Valley Restaurant, family business of the year; Cuisine et Passion, retail business of the year; Pilon Hamilton Real Estate, service business of the year; Dr. Michael Mattinen, professional of the year; Arts Ottawa East, community support non-profit organization of the year; Rangoli Indian Cuisine and Sweets, restaurant of the year; Joanne Springett, customer service excellence

award; Leslie Scott, young business person of the year; the Mortgage Centre, corporate citizen of the year; Eric St. Cyr of Eric's Academy of Music for business person of the year; and finally, Gerry Dust of Dust Evans Lawyers/Avocats, who received the Chamber Champion award for his years of service to the local business community.

Congratulations to the nominees, the organizers and the executive of the Orléans chamber, including their chair, Mark Thibault, and executive director Peter Stewart.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise to urge members of this House to support my bill to end the 14-week-old DriveTest strike, which has affected over 370,000 people so far, and thousands more with each passing day.

Since I introduced the bill, my office has been flooded with calls and e-mails from people from across the province concerned with the effects this strike is having on their livelihood. One of those people is Nancy Wilder, whose daughter is forced to pay $20 for each day the strike continues in travel expenses just to get to college and to her part-time job. She wrote, "Something must be done. In light of the economic times, a strike is not in the best interest of anyone."

Diane Hodges, who operates driver education centres in St. Thomas, Aylmer and Tillsonburg, writes, "Findley's Driver Education has been in business for over 35 years. I have now worked here for 30 years and took over the ownership three years ago. I have never seen business so bad. Our enrolment is the lowest it has been in years. I really don't know how much longer we can stay in business if there isn't a turnaround by Christmas."

Even Aurora DriveTest examiner David Sepejak said in the York Region News, "I can't speak for the whole union, but I get the feeling everyone is ready to go back to work."

It's time for the government to step in and help the struggling small businesses, their employees, students, truck drivers and those who need to see this strike ended in order to pay their bills and keep their jobs or in fact get a job in the first place.

1310

HEALTH PROMOTION

M^me^ France Gélinas: Today I want to talk about the lack of leadership in health promotion by the McGuinty government.

The smoke-free Ontario program was cut by $17 million, yet treating tobacco-related illness costs us $1.7 billion each and every year. These cuts make no sense. They are penny wise but pound foolish. Last December, this House voted to ban individually sold candy-flavoured cigarillos that are very popular among young people and hook them onto tobacco, yet, a year later, the Minister of Health Promotion has failed to enact the law.

The Legislature voted to support my private member's bill that would force large chain restaurants to post calories on their menus—calorie labelling. This bill seems to have died in committee while the obesity epidemic keeps growing.

A Liberal MPP brought forward a private member's bill that would prevent minors from using tanning beds, yet despite evidence that tanning is more dangerous and carcinogenic than arsenic, the minister has let this bill gather dust for almost two years.

Ontario still doesn't have a coordinated breast-feeding strategy: 90% of women want to breastfeed; 20% are successful.

We need to do more. A proactive health ministry would save billions of dollars down the road. This minister is failing. We need one who is ready to act.

TAXATION

Mr. David Zimmer: We have heard a lot from the opposition recently that Liberal members are not consulting and meeting with their constituents regarding Bill 218, the tax reform package, including the HST piece. The fact of the matter is that Liberal members have been meeting with their constituents. I've been meeting with members of my riding in Willowdale to discuss the tax reform package and how it will benefit families and businesses, and I know that my Liberal colleagues in our caucus have been doing the same thing on a regular basis.

I began with a post-budget breakfast in Willowdale shortly after the budget was announced. I continue to hold weekly meetings with individual constituents every Friday of every week. I have had the following group meetings in Willowdale: the West Lansing Homeowners Association, the Silverview Community Association, the Yonge Corridor Condo Association, the Bayview Village Homeowners' Association, the Newtonbrook United Church, and, just last night, the Bayview-Cummer Neighbourhood Association. I've got upcoming meetings planned over the next two months.

These meetings have been both frank and productive. People understand that we have to rebuild our manufacturing economy and that our tax reform package is the key to rebuilding our manufacturing economy, an economy which supports jobs, health care, education and our social services net. It's about saving jobs; it's about saving our economy. It's not about, as the Tories are doing, deserting this House, deserting the debate.

TAXATION

Mr. Charles Sousa: My colleagues and I believe the people of Ontario deserve to hear the full truth about how our government's tax reforms will impact families and businesses. That is why I have already met with 11 community organizations and ratepayer groups in my riding, free of charge, to discuss Ontario's tax reform package. More than 1,000 Mississauga South residents have taken advantage of these public meetings to participate in open

discussions and to present their views. They also give me the opportunity to dispel some of the myths and fictions about the HST that have been circulating.

Our tax reform package, which includes $10.6 billion in personal income tax cuts and $4.5 billion in business tax cuts, will result in a $3.4-billion decrease in provincial revenues. That is not a tax grab.

I have also shared with them independent reports like the one from TD Economics which predicts that consumer prices in Ontario will increase a modest 0.7%, given the associated cost savings. At the same time, Jack Mintz's report estimates that the increased economic activity resulting from these tax reforms will cause annual incomes of workers to increase up to 8.8%.

Experts agree that harmonizing the inefficient provincial sales tax with the federal GST is the single most important thing we can do to stimulate our economy. It will create 600,000 net new jobs and increase capital investment by $47 billion.

I will continue to meet with residents and businesses in my riding to discuss and answer questions about tax reform. I encourage all members from both sides of the House to do the same and to tell the whole truth.

TAXATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: On New Year's Day, Ontarians stand poised to receive the largest tax cut in the province's history. Before the Legislature stands a budget bill to permanently cut personal and corporate tax rates, permanently double seniors' property tax grants and implement permanent sales tax credits. The Conservatives and the NDP are opposed to having Ontarians receive the cuts to the taxes they pay. The Conservatives and the NDP are opposed to a comprehensive program to create an estimated 591,000 net new jobs, attract $47 billion in new investment and see real incomes rise by nearly 9%.

Across Ontario, more than 160 business groups, service clubs and ratepayers' groups have heard from their MPPs throughout the year, but the Conservatives and the NDP have disingenuously called for public hearings in order to stall the legislation and deny Ontarians the tax cuts their government has proposed for them. More than 300 members of both the Mississauga and Brampton boards of trade heard from seven of their MPPs at a large public post-budget breakfast. All our Rotary Clubs in western Mississauga have had the chance to ask questions. Seniors' groups, ethnic communities and business groups have all been heard. Now it's time to cut costs for Ontarians and build our province for the 21st century.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member from Mississauga–Streetsville to withdraw the comment he made that, in my mind, was unparliamentary.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, Speaker, if you feel one was improper, I will withdraw it.

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I want to commend the member from Mississauga South for conducting his consultation without charge, which is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is not a point of order.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 203, An Act to allow for better cross-border policing co-operation with other Canadian provinces and territories and to make consequential amendments to the Police Services Act / Projet de loi 203, Loi visant à permettre une meilleure coopération avec les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada en ce qui concerne les services policiers transfrontaliers et à apporter des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services policiers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1317 to 1322.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gélinas, France	Pendergast, Leeanna
Albanese, Laura	Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Barrett, Toby	Johnson, Rick	Rinaldi, Lou
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margarett	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Bisson, Gilles	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Sterling, Norman W.
Dickson, Joe	Mangat, Amrit	Wilson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David
Fonseca, Peter	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would seek unanimous consent from this House to bring

forward for immediate debate Bill 225, brought forward by my colleague from Simcoe North, that would end the current DriveTest strike.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Newmarket–Aurora seeks unanimous consent to bring Bill 225 forward. Agreed? I'm afraid I heard a no.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised Ontarians he would not raise their taxes and then broke that promise after getting elected; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty also said it would be 'silly' to raise taxes in a time of economic challenge; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new plan to blend the provincial sales tax with the GST into one harmonized tax, the 13% Dalton sales tax (DST), scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2010, represents one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, at a time when Ontarians are still feeling the effects of the recession; and

"Whereas the 13% DST will increase the cost of a long list of items not previously subject to the provincial sales tax, including electricity, cable, gas, transit fares, haircuts, newspapers and magazines, your morning cup of coffee—all things Ontarians depend on every day—making it even more difficult for families and seniors to make ends meet; and

"Whereas the 13% DST will also raise the cost of carpentry and plumbing services, heating and air conditioning repairs, landscaping and snowplowing, renovations and other professional services, meaning that home prices, condo fees and rents will all go up, and businesses will have a harder time paying the bills;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government not impose this new tax on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to support my constituents in Kitchener–Waterloo and to sign my name to this petition.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of the city of Greater Sudbury, the riding of Sudbury and Nickel Belt.

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service.... ; and

"Whereas, by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Paisley.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is to proclaim April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, films, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month" and support the private member's resolution by Mr. Ruprecht and Mr. Colle on December 3.

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

1330

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over $400,000 ... electricity ... magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than $30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances,

vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I will sign this, and I agree with it.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly submitted by the Royal Bank's Mississauga regional office. I especially want to acknowledge Walter Sinclair, Laurée Murray and Carolynn Hamm for having gathered the signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers.... ; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Nicolas to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents in the great riding of Oxford. At the bottom of the petition, it has been added that there are some signatures on here that: "Although not in your constituency—we believe this HST is the ultimate stealth tax grab—it must be stopped!" I present that on their behalf even though they're not from the riding. The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over $500,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under $4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition on their behalf.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that has been sent to me by the Effort organization of Pakistani professionals. I especially would like to acknowledge Jawwad Khushid and Hassan Chaudhry for having gathered some of the signatures on it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Maggie to carry it for me.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries," from Colombia to Paraguay to Peru; "and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, films, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

I support this petition and I'll affix my name to it.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have hundreds more petitions regarding the McGuinty sales tax. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government is planning to merge the 8% provincial sales tax and the 5% federal sales tax; and

"Whereas the new 13% sales tax will be applied to products and services not previously subject to provincial sales tax such as gasoline, home heating fuels, home renovations, haircuts, hamburgers, television service, Internet service, telephone and cell services, taxi fees, bus, train and airplane tickets, and dry cleaning services; and

"Whereas rural and northern Ontarians will be particularly hard hit by Mr. McGuinty's new sales tax, as will seniors and families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government should eliminate the new sales tax."

I've signed this petition and I'll give it to Hadhy.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This is a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on population-based social services funding.

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers. The child poverty level in Peel has grown from 14% to 20% between 2001 and 2006, and youth violence is rising; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

I agree with the petitioners, so I'll put my signature on it.

TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Simcoe North do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over $400,000; and

1340

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals ... haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I'm pleased to sign it and give it to Connor.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition on behalf of my seatmate, the hard-working member for Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and signed by an impressive number of his constituents in Niagara Falls. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness;

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease

are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity;

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and to ask page Paisley to carry it for me.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for a motion regarding committee business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that notwithstanding the order of the House dated November 17, 2009, the following amendments be permitted to be moved on Bill 212 in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: that subsection 12(6) of schedule 18 to the bill be struck out, and that subsection 35(2) of schedule 18 to the bill be struck out.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All members have heard the motion. Agreed? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Hamilton Mountain, to welcome the students from St. Jean de Brébeuf high school to Queen's Park today. Thank you for joining us.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR DE LA SENSIBILISATION À LA CARDIOPATHIE CONGÉNITALE

Ms. Jaczek moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 178, An Act to proclaim February 14 in each year as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day / Projet de loi 178, Loi proclamant le 14 février de chaque année Jour de la sensibilisation à la cardiopathie congénitale.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's my pleasure to start the debate on second reading of Bill 178, An Act to proclaim February 14 in each year as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day.

This is a bill that is of some importance to guests sitting in the west members' gallery. I'd like to introduce, from the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance, Shelagh Ross, Ted Thaler and Taryn Simbrow; from the Toronto Congenital Cardiac Centre for Adults at the Toronto General Hospital, Qunyu Li, Adrienne Kovacs, and Dr. Erwin Oechslin, who is the director; and from the Hospital for Sick Children, Sherry Ree Stevens and Jackie Hubert.

We also have another very special guest, Trish Johnson, the daughter of our colleague Rick Johnson from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. In the course of the debate, you will come to understand why she's here.

This bill is the result of some very effective communication from a former constituent of mine, Mr. John MacEachern. As president of the volunteer charitable organization the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance, he convinced me that congenital heart disease, or CHD, was an area of medicine that deserved particular attention, and that all the medical miracles of the last 50 years in relation to CHD need continued public awareness and ongoing research. John has now retired and moved to Nova Scotia, and I do hope he is watching us online as I proceed to tell his story.

John MacEachern was born on October 17, 1941, in Toronto, and was immediately diagnosed as having tetralogy of Fallot, better known as blue baby syndrome, a condition that is not conducive to life. There were four things wrong with his heart: a hole in the wall between the two ventricles, a narrowed pulmonary valve, an overriding aorta and an enlarged left ventricle. Doctors advised John's devastated parents that his life expectancy would not be any more than eight years, as there was no cure for his condition. John had to be carried upstairs and would squat down to get oxygen into his system every time he tried to run or exert any kind of energy.

At the age of four, late in 1944, his parents, Gordon and Dorothy MacEachern, met Dr. Gordon Murray by chance at a Christmas party and explained to him their problem. He vaguely recalled that just a couple of weeks earlier he had read that Dr. Alfred Blalock and Dr. Helen Taussig had performed the first Blalock-Taussig shunt on a blue baby at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Murray took it upon himself to travel to Baltimore, and met with Doctors Blalock and Taussig to learn about their history-making surgery. He returned to Toronto and met with John's parents and advised them that there was a slim bit of hope for John. He would perform the Blalock-Taussig shunt surgery if they wished. As it was strictly experimental and long before the days of OHIP,

he said he would not charge them. They agreed, as it was John's only hope of survival. For their part, they had to collect blood from all their relatives, neighbours, business associates, teachers in nearby schools, parishioners in their church etc., as there was no blood bank in those days. The surgery took place at the Toronto General Hospital in 1945 and was a great success.

John became a very well known businessman in York region. He married and had four children and to date has three grandchildren. However, in 1991, at the age of 50, he collapsed while skiing with his family. He was operated on by Dr. Bill Williams, a senior cardiovascular surgeon from the Hospital for Sick Children, who took his team over to Toronto General Hospital for the emergency surgery. He removed John's 46-year-old shunt, patched up the quarter-sized hole between the ventricles with a piece of Dacron, and replaced the pulmonary valve with a pig's valve.

John has not been idle since. He has been working on an international CHD patients' organization, the International Congenital Heart Coalition, which now has 21 member countries and recently met here in Toronto. This is an organization representing those patients affected by CHD who are advocating for more research and support for their lifelong problems.

Ontario has been a leader in the treatment of CHD for more than 60 years. The Hospital for Sick Children hosts a world-class CHD clinic, and the Toronto General Hospital University Health Network is home to the world's largest and internationally renowned adult congenital heart disease clinic, headed by Dr. Erwin Oechslin. He recently updated me on statistics in Ontario related to CHD, and those in the preamble of the bill as it stands, as I knew the stats at first reading, have been somewhat revised.

First of all, congenital heart disease is the world's leading birth defect. CHD affects one in 70 Canadian newborns. Twelve Canadians are born each day with a congenital heart defect. Now, there are many types of congenital heart defects: abnormal passages in the heart or between blood vessels, problems with the heart valves, problems with the placement or development of blood vessels near the heart, and problems with the development of the heart itself. So it is now estimated that some 180,000 Canadian adults and children live with CHD. Of those, 80,000 are in Ontario, and of those, we have 40,000 children and 40,000 adults. In Canada there are about 100,000 adults who as children had surgery to correct congenital heart defects, and at least half of these face the prospect of complications, multiple surgeries and/or premature or sudden death.

Historically, the focus of CHD care was confined to newborns and children whose life expectancy was limited to weeks, months and, in a few cases, several years.

1350

The amazing progress over the last 50 years in diagnosis, surgery and in the newer interventional catheter-based procedures has vastly improved survival, so that now more than 50% of people living with CHD are adults. The proportion of adults with CHD will continue to increase, because currently 98% of children born with heart defects will survive to adulthood.

There are eight cardiologists in Canada who have specifically trained in the field of adult congenital heart defects, and of those—we are particularly fortunate here in Ontario—we have seven. We also have some four surgeons in this province who actually have expertise in adult CHD.

Clearly, there are far fewer resources for the specialized care of adult CHD patients than for other cardiac patients. As a result, wait times for clinical visits and surgical intervention are much longer than for other cardiac patients, leading of course to increased anxiety, added risk and potentially even death.

So our focus now must turn from survival to improving the health and quality of life of people with heart defects. It is absolutely clear that research, education and ongoing support from stakeholders is needed. In fact, if anyone knows any medical student, any resident in cardiology or cardiac surgery—this is clearly an area that truly is needed, to extend expertise to service this growing number of individuals suffering from CHD.

My colleague from Etobicoke North will certainly be giving us a little more detail in relation to some of the medical issues facing these patients.

I think it's good for people to know that only some 10% of heart defects are caused by specific genetic abnormalities. For the remaining 90%, there's a poorly understood combination of genetic predisposition and environmental factors that are thought to be responsible. Some congenital heart defects result from abnormalities in the mother's health during pregnancy, and in some cases it's possible that there might be some prevention that could be brought to bear. Certain infections: If a mother gets rubella while pregnant, her baby has a 35% risk of developing a heart defect, something that should be easily solved with rubella immunization. Certain chronic conditions such as diabetes or systemic lupus erythematosus may also contribute to a baby suffering from CHD. Alcohol, street drugs and a number of prescription drugs, such as seizure medications, may be involved. No matter what the cause, specialized treatment is clearly what is required.

In conclusion, I would just like to comment on: Why February 14? We all know that February is Heart Month. Valentine's Day is a day that symbolizes love. For any of us who have had children, I think as we looked at our newborn and we counted the fingers and toes, we earnestly hoped that everything inside was also as physically healthy as possible. So I think it's a particularly fitting day when we consider the love that parents have for their children, the type of care that children with CHD do require, and the anxiety of those parents as their child moves through a medical system that obviously is dedicated to doing its very best.

We need to ensure that Ontario's proud tradition as a leader in the treatment of CHD is preserved, and so the importance of ongoing research, clinical expertise and

support for patients and families must be recognized. I hope that some of the debate today will allow for some further public acknowledgment of this very important condition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill 178. I would like to commend the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for bringing attention to the issue of congenital heart defects by designating February 14 as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day. I think it is a very important issue.

Congenital heart defects affect more infants and children in Ontario than I think most people realize. As the member mentioned with a few statistics, congenital heart defects affect one in 70 Canadian newborns, and they will be born with one of the 35 known types of congenital heart defects. In fact, in some parts of Ontario this ratio is more like one in 50. Congenital heart defects kill more children every year than all childhood cancers combined. They are the number one birth defect and the number one cause of death from a birth defect in Canada.

Unfortunately, there is currently no cure, so early detection is essential. A routine level 2 ultrasound done during pregnancy and an echocardiogram done routinely after birth could save many lives, yet in Ontario there is no routine prenatal or newborn screening for congenital heart defects. That's why this bill is particularly important: to bring attention to congenital heart defects and to advocate for improved detection and treatment options.

The statistics are one thing, but I would like to speak just for a moment about a little boy in my area who was born with a congenital heart defect and the journey that he and his family embarked on as a result.

Wyatt was born on April 27, 2007, and minutes after he was born he began to have problems breathing and began to turn blue. He was immediately transferred to the cardiac critical care unit at the Hospital for Sick Children, where he was diagnosed with a serious congenital heart defect known as pulmonary atresia—most of these things will make more sense to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham; she'll be familiar with this—with ASD, VSA and MAPCAs, which are major aorto-pulmonary collateral arteries; TOF, tracheo-oesophageal fistula; and DiGeorge syndrome. In other words, Wyatt was a very sick little boy, but his joy for life was boundless.

He became known as the little warrior, as he underwent five open-heart surgeries, two cardiac catheterizations, two airway stints, a tracheotomy, and countless other procedures and tests. His mother and devoted family were with him every step of the way, and in fact for his mother, her entire world became the Hospital for Sick Children for a number of months as she lived in hospital with him. While there, his mother wrote of him, "He works so hard, he is determined and has the heart of a fighter. I am so thankful and proud to be the mother of such a wonderful boy. Wyatt is so brave and strong. I watch him and all the other kids go through more in a day than most adults in a lifetime. Amazing, absolutely amazing." And so Wyatt was, but sadly the odds against him were too great and he died on May 16, 2009.

Wyatt's mother and family are determined to honour and remember his courage and determination. In January 2008, Wyatt's Warriors was established by his family to try and make a difference in lives of other children with congenital heart defects and their families. Specifically, the goals of Wyatt's Warriors are to: (1) raise awareness, not just to the general public but also to the government, and lobby for some changes in prenatal screening and newborn testing; and (2) fund various projects at Sick Kids to help children with congenital heart defects and their facilities. Their ultimate hope is that one day no family will have to suffer through the loss of their child due to a congenital heart defect.

Wyatt's aunt, Laura Celsie, has been instrumental in establishing Wyatt's Warriors and is extremely active in several roles, both in fundraising and advocacy. They have achieved amazing success already with their first golf tournament and their first Have a Heart Valentine's Gala, which was held in the Durham riding on February 13 of this past year. This is very apropos of the private member's bill.

They are doing their bit. They have been doing all they can both to raise money to help other families and to raise awareness of this. So at this point, I'd say it's up to all of us as legislators. I would urge all of the members of this House to not only support this bill, which I wholeheartedly support, but also to do our bit by making the changes and doing whatever we can do to make sure that we support prenatal screening, prenatal testing to assist all of these families and to advocate for anything else we can do to make sure that we try to eliminate the congenital heart defects or to allow people to have a chance at a normal life expectancy.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to rise today about—I have to call her by her riding, sorry—the member from Oak Ridges–Markham's private member's bill, Bill 178, the Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day Act.

We certainly support this bill, and as this opportunity arises, it is my pleasure to talk a little bit about congenital heart disease as well as some of the concerns that we in the NDP have regarding people living with congenital heart disease and their families who support them.

I guess if I am going to talk about this, I need to explain a little bit about what it is. A congenital heart defect is a structural problem or defect in the heart that is present at birth. Most of the time, it manifests itself quite quickly, and sometimes a few days later. CHD, congenital heart disease, can involve the walls of the heart, the valves of the heart, the arteries and the veins near the heart. Congenital heart disease can disrupt the normal flow of blood through the heart. The blood flow can sometimes slow down, sometimes go in the wrong direc-

tion, sometimes go to the wrong place and sometimes be blocked completely. None of those options are good; all of those options require treatment.

There are many types of congenital heart defects and they include abnormal normal passages in the heart or between blood vessels, problems with the heart valves, problems with the placement or the development of blood vessels near the heart and problems with the development of the heart itself. The severity and degree of medical assistance often varies, although surgery is often required, and often on the newborn.

Some of the facts: Congenital heart disease is considered to be the most common birth defect worldwide, and it is the leading cause of birth-defect-related death. It is a serious issue, and a lot of people die from CHD.

As was mentioned, 12 Canadians are born each day with a congenital heart defect, and it will affect one in 70 Canadian newborns, although 90% of the babies who are born with congenital heart disease will grow up to be adults—90% of them. That's wonderful. We sure wish that it was 100%, but 90% of them will make it into adulthood.

But that means that it results in a growing population of young adults who require lifelong cardiac care. We are very fortunate that we are able to help those infants develop, and you should see the amount of—in French we say le branle-bas de combat—work that is often required really quickly after birth to ensure that those infants live to see their first day.

All of those resources are pulled together. Very high tertiary and quarternary care teams are pulled together to help those infants so that they live. But it is important that we continue that level of care throughout the years, because as they age—just like everyone of us—because they have a congenital heart disease, they will often require care as they grow to continue to be healthy, productive members of our community, certainly like the example that the member from Oak Ridges–Markham brought forward today, which had a very happy ending.

So 180,000 Canadians are the number of people presently living with congenital heart disease in this country—180,000 people. It is very common. And for about 130,000 of them, there is very little to support them and very little access to care. Certainly, the access to care is not equivalent to what was available to them at birth and not equivalent to other people who suffer heart disease.

There are only 15 regional facilities in Canada, and there are really only five regional centres of excellence that have been identified in our country: five centres, and we've already said we are dealing with 180,000 people who live with this disease and will need ongoing care.

As was mentioned, we have eight cardiologists here in Canada who have specialized and trained in the field of adult congenital heart defects. Historically, the focus of congenital heart disease care was confined to newborns and children whose life expectancy was often measured in days, weeks, months and a few years, but things have changed in the last 50 years and the miracle example that was given is now repeated many times a week in this province and in this country. The amazing progress of the last 50 years—in diagnosis, surgery and other interventions—has drastically and vastly improved the survival rate, which is great news.

Presently, as I mentioned, 130,000 adults living with chronic congenital heart disease in Canada have no program equivalent to what they had at birth. If you look at the heart program that is being brought forward, it often targets what is called "lifestyle acquired"; that is, people who have a heart problem later on in life, either infarctus or another heart problem. Those people have access to top-notch care, but adults living with congenital heart disease do not have that level of access. As was mentioned, there is a wide variety of heart defects, each requiring different levels of intervention and monitoring.

In summary, adult patients have far fewer resources than children, and in general, they wait as much as 33 times longer for surgical intervention than patients who have an acquired heart problem—they've had a cardiac arrest or a heart problem such as a blockage etc. They can get access to care, but the people with congenital heart disease have to wait, and often this wait is very long.

We all know that the patient who waits faces the prospect of complications, faces the prospect of premature and often sudden death, and the numbers are growing. Right now, 50% of the people living with congenital heart disease are adults, which is great news because, a few decades ago, most of those patients didn't live to see adulthood. So, in one sense, it's good news. We've made progress. In the other sense, we also have to realize that we have an obligation to give ready access to them for the care that they will require for the rest of their lives.

To me, this is an obligation through the private member's bill that was introduced by the member from Oak Ridges–Markham. We have an opportunity to bring awareness. Awareness is a good thing, because in the long run, it will help people living with congenital heart disease and their families by keeping this issue in the forefront.

1410

C'est important pour moi aujourd'hui de vous parler du projet de loi de la députée d'Oak Ridges–Markham, parce que c'est le type de problème que l'on rencontre souvent. En fait, un problème congénital du cœur touche une naissance sur 70 ici en Ontario, comme au Canada et comme ailleurs. Cela arrive dans plusieurs familles; c'est arrivé dans ma famille, à mon cousin Martin Gélinas. Je ne vous dirai pas les détails de son problème à lui, mais il a un problème cardiaque qu'on a découvert à la naissance. Il a maintenant 40 ans. Il est ingénieur. Il vit une vie pleine et peut participer, mais il a beaucoup de difficultés à assurer un suivi.

Au cours des années, pendant l'adolescence, dans la vingtaine et dans la trentaine, plusieurs problèmes se sont développés, l'un après l'autre, toujours assez compliqués, et les problèmes d'accès se sont multipliés. Il y a très peu de centres d'excellence pour aider les gens qui sont nés

avec un problème cardiaque et qui vivront avec pendant toute leur vie.

Si on regarde il y a quelques années, ces gens-là, les bébés qui naissaient avec ce genre de problème-là, on leur donnait des jours, des semaines, des mois, au maximum quelques années, à vivre. Maintenant, la technologie a progressé tel que l'on peut maintenant s'attendre à ce que 90 % de ces gens-là vont pouvoir se rendre à la vie adulte, être productifs et mener une vie très semblable à celle de tout le monde ici, mais ils auront besoin de soins. L'accès aux soins est extrêmement difficile; on est chanceux, nous, en Ontario, que nous avons des spécialistes—on en a sept ici en Ontario—mais même avec sept cardiologues spécialisés, il est difficile pour les adultes d'avoir accès. Ces gens-là ont des problèmes complexes et compliqués, et la rémunération fait en sorte que les chirurgiens ne peuvent pas se spécialiser seulement là-dedans. Ils doivent faire un peu de tout pour assurer un salaire adéquat.

La proposition tombe à point, parce que plus on en parlera, plus on aura l'opportunité d'y amener des changements, et le changement, quant à moi, sera pour le mieux. On doit continuer d'appuyer les gens; ça vaut la peine. Les succès qu'on a eus lorsqu'ils étaient tous petits, on peut les multiplier lorsqu'ils seront à l'âge adulte, et ce sera pour le bénéfice de tous.

Je félicite ma collègue d'Oak Ridges–Markham pour cette initiative. Les néo-démocrates vont voter en faveur. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: First of all, it's an honour, a privilege and, of course, a responsibility here in this chamber to rise and speak in support of my honourable colleague Dr. Helena Jaczek from Oak Ridges–Markham on the congenital heart disease awareness day and week proclamation that she has brought forward, Bill 178.

Of course, as a physician myself, as a graduate of the University of Toronto, class of 1988, I'm also honoured and privileged to welcome many of the members from institutions that I happened to train at: Toronto General Hospital as well as the Hospital for Sick Children.

I can remember, for example, I believe in probably first year, maybe second year, of med school cardiology rotations, when we had the privilege of actually visiting individuals who had congenital heart disease and had come for surgery and aftercare after surgery and operations and the various other rehabilitative measures, that we had the opportunity to, as we say, listen to the chest, or clinics of auscultation, which is a fancy word for the doctors taking out their stethoscopes and listening to the various patients and examining them.

I have to say that it was, first of all, not only an extraordinary teaching opportunity, learning opportunity, but it was probably, from our perspective as relatively young and green medical students, frightening because we had been used to hearing the chest sounds, the heart sounds, in a particular way, often not with excessive amounts of pathology—the heartbeat and maybe an occasional extra sound, which we physicians might call things like heart murmurs. But when we listened to the individuals with congenital heart disease, the best way to describe it was as if machinery—or probably Jurassic Park or motorcycles gone awry. You can imagine listening to individuals who had these kinds of heart sounds, when we all did a sort of double-take, wondering how these individuals were actually functioning and how they were actually going about their day-to-day activities and calling upon the reserve capacity of the heart.

So when I see this particular bill, Bill 178, An Act to proclaim February 14 in each year as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day, I think it's a very commendable act. I would commend not only the member for Oak Ridges–Markham for fusing or conflating her professional expertise with her parliamentary abilities here in bringing this health and welfare bill forward, but I'd also, for a moment, like to commend our colleague from the Conservative Part,y the MPP for Whitby–Oshawa, Ms. Christine Elliott, as well as Madame France Gélinas, la députée de Nickel Belt ici à l'Assemblée provinciale, for not only their support of this particular bill, but also for their very lucid and comprehensible explanations of medical terminology. I enjoyed relearning some of the information that you presented.

As has been mentioned, this is the most common cause of all birth defects. Approximately one in 70 Canadian newborns have it; something on the order of almost 40,000 adults in the province of Ontario have congenital heart disease. Just to make it clear, first of all, heart disease as a domain is, as you can appreciate, a collection of illnesses. We would tend to think of heart disease as perhaps a group of disorders more towards the middle age of people, say 35, 40, 45 and above; things to do, for example, with smoking, cholesterol, poor exercise, high blood pressure, sugar diabetes and all the rest of it. This is the opposite: This is heart disease that one is actually born with—"de la naissance," or right from birth. That's, of course, what makes it especially acute, especially poignant, from an emotional point of view, because you're dealing not only with very young children, but also the emotional turmoil that the parents are going through. That's why it's very important for all of us in our various domains to support this type of legislation.

J'ai le plaisir aujourd'hui de me mettre debout pour soutenir ma collègue l'honorable D^re^ Helena Jaczek, députée provinciale de la circonscription d'Oak Ridges–Markham.

La maladie cardiaque congénitale est une des plus grandes causes de la malformation à la naissance. Elle affecte un enfant sur 70 nouveau-nés; 12 Canadiens naissent chaque jour avec cette maladie cardiaque. Il y a beaucoup de sortes de ces malformations : des connexions anormales dans le cœur ou entre les vaisseaux sanguins, des problèmes avec les valves ventriculaires, ou des problèmes de développement ou de mauvais emplacement.

Comme médecins, nous évaluons presque 200 000 Canadiens, tout âge confondu. Au Canada, il y a plus de 100 000 adultes qui ont subi une intervention chirurgicale

à l'enfance pour corriger cette malformation. Malheureusement, plus ou moins la moitié de ces gens font face à beaucoup d'interventions chirurgicales, ou à une mort précoce ou subite.

Je veux exprimer et partager avec vous, et avec tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes, les signes suivants de ces maladies : murmure cardiaque, décoloration un peu bleuâtre de la peau, ce que les médecins appellent « cyanose », respiration rapide, malnutrition ou malabsorption, disproportion entre l'âge et le poids, et fatigue pendant l'exercice physique.

That's why it's so important to support this particular bill.

I will yield the floor to my honourable colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Mr. Rick Johnson.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): During private members' time, we go in a rotation, so I will ask for further debate.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to warmly congratulate the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for bringing forward this bill. I think already today in the House, as I've listened to the comments from all of my colleagues here, that we have made progress in doing what it was that she was hoping that we could do, and that was to raise the awareness about congenital heart disease. Of course, which she's asking for is that every year on February 14, we would proclaim that day as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day. So I do want to congratulate her. Thank you so much.

I want to thank the people that are in the audience today, whether you are someone who suffers from CHD or whether you're one of the outstanding health providers who really do enhance the quality of life for people. We really appreciate your presence here today in support of this private member's bill. I will certainly be supporting it.

We hear about congenital heart disease often when children are born. I know it often strikes fear in the hearts of parents who are informed that this is something that their child will be living with. One of the things I don't think most people probably understand is that it is the most common of all the birth defects, and that one in 70 newborns suffer from and have this birth defect. So the problem is, it's large; there are many people in the province. We know there are 20,000 children and, of course, about 37,000 adults in our province who have CHD.

1420

We know that there isn't currently a cure, and obviously we need to not only raise awareness of the disease, but we also need to continue to do research and ensure that governments everywhere—in our own case, particularly here in the province of Ontario—do all they can in order to put forth the measures. We've talked about the need for early detection, and that need is certainly there; the need for prenatal screening. Then, of course, we need to ensure that throughout the lives of these individuals, we give them support, provide them with the services that are necessary and hope they will have a normal life expectancy.

This is a very significant bill, and I applaud all of the people who have spoken: my own colleague from Whitby–Oshawa, the health critic for the NDP and, of course, those in the Liberal Party. I think everyone would agree that this is a private member's bill that we can all support, and hopefully, at the end of the day, we can continue to increase public awareness of CHD, but also ensure that there are enhanced resources and more research done in order that we can help those families.

I would just say, in conclusion, that I was quite touched by the personal stories that were delivered today—it certainly gives you a greater comprehension of life for those people who do have CHD and their families—by both the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, who put forward the bill, when she talked about the influence that someone had on her life and on her bringing the bill forward, and of course my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa when she spoke about Wyatt and Wyatt's Warriors.

I applaud all those who have participated. Hopefully we can move this forward, raise awareness, do more research and provide the support that is so desperately needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'm very proud to stand up and support this bill. I think that anything we can do to raise awareness of this condition is a great thing to do.

I'd like to just tell a personal story that started 21 years ago at Lakeridge hospital when my daughter was born. She always has been a unique young lady. She chooses to do things a little differently. When she was born, she was born face up, ingested a whole bunch of fluid and didn't breathe, which was probably a disguise for the heart condition that we didn't know she had.

She was the first code pink at Lakeridge hospital; they called in the crash team and got her going. She was extremely blue. They assumed it was because of the fluid she had ingested. When they got her going, if you remember the movie E.T., she turned pink from the centre of her chest out; we still have pictures at home of her with blue fingers. So for the first year or two of her life, we referred to her as our Smurf.

When she was growing up, she was very athletic, participating in soccer, dance and figure skating. A great little soccer player, she played indoor and outdoor soccer. When she was a teenager, the soccer team—it was an all-girl soccer team, the first from the city of Kawartha Lakes—lost two games over a four-year period. So they were very successful. One year she was the top scorer in the Durham Soccer League.

Then, we were at a soccer tournament in Alliston, Ontario—she was 15. They set her up perfectly; she got a great breakaway. It was a hot summer day, and 20 feet in front of the goal she passed out. The paramedics got her going, and they said, "Has she eaten today? Is it a lack of water? Is it the heat?" Whatever. Anyway, that was the first time we'd ever seen anything go wrong.

We went to the doctor and went through a bunch of tests. They talked about it maybe being stress-induced

asthma, not eating properly that day, a panic attack, teenage drama. Then, after a whole series of tests one day we were in one of the specialists' offices, because she would occasionally get tingling fingers. He said, "Her lungs are okay. Neurologically it's okay." He said, "She has a hole in her heart," and then he went on describing other things, and we said, "What are you talking about? A hole in her heart?"

They determined, in conjunction with our family physician, Dr. Dave Fitzpatrick, from Oshawa, that she had a ventricular septal defect. We ended up at Sick Kids hospital, where she was brought to the attention of Dr. Rajiv Chaturvedi and Dr. Claudia Almeida. Through a process, a month before her 18th birthday they repaired the hole in her heart. Ten years earlier, we were told, this would have involved open-heart surgery. When she had the procedure done—I'll give you the Reader's Digest version that I was given—they basically did a tiny incision in the groin, inserted a wire through her artery up into her heart, pressed a button or something and a little umbrella opened, the size of a dime. They pulled it back against the hole in her heart. Another button released the other side. They screwed the two pieces together, plugging the hole in her heart, pressed the button and pulled it out.

My daughter is sitting back here.

Applause.

Mr. Rick Johnson: The piece that they inserted, we were told, was made out of platinum, so she refers to herself as a true platinum blonde. As a matter of fact, when I was coming here and I mentioned who was speaking and I mentioned the member from Whitby–Oshawa, she said, "Oh, we share the same hairdresser."

One of the unique things that happened out of this was that Trish has suffered from migraines when she was little and all through her life. When they did the procedure, because all the blood was now flowing in the right direction, they said that for the next couple of weeks she was going to have very strong headaches, which she did, but she hasn't had a migraine since. I don't know if there's a connection. They're talking about a number of things.

We were pleased to have had follow-ups since then. It's been four years since she had the procedure done. Listening to the tragic story you told, we feel fortunate. We're tremendously happy with the service, treatment and care that we've received from Dr. Oechslin. You're her follow-up surgeon, her doctor, and it's great to meet you today. I know that she's in great hands. We really appreciate the work that was done, and in particular I'd like to mention Susan Johnston and the staff at the Sick Kids cath. lab. for describing the procedures and what she was going to go through in such a great way.

For this procedure, which 15 years ago would have been open-heart surgery, she was checked into the hospital at 9 in the morning and she was out at 6 o'clock in the afternoon. That's such a credit to the surgeons we have and the treatment that we have in Ontario and in Canada.

I just think this bill is so valuable because it's going to let parents know about the procedure and what could possibly be there, because we all want our children to grow old, so that they can look after their parents, just as my daughter has promised to look after me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I didn't realize there would be much extra time left over, but I just wanted to say to the member that we'll be supporting this piece of legislation. It's very unfortunate that we don't get along with all legislation in this House in such a friendly manner.

My only concern, when I went over and talked to you earlier, was whether or not it would do away with Valentine's Day, and I understand that Valentine's Day is still there. But I think it's so nice to hear these stories from Mr. Johnson and the stories we've heard here this afternoon about the wonderful things that can lead to awareness, and why we're actually proud to be members of this Legislature. Whether we draw awareness with this piece of legislation today, or even if there's just a debate taking place today, it means a lot to those families that have suffered, and it means a lot to the young people to be born in the future as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for Oak Ridges–Markham, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to thank my colleagues, those from Whitby–Oshawa, Nickel Belt, Etobicoke North, Kitchener–Waterloo, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Simcoe North, for their kind comments. It is indeed a pleasure to have some consensus in this often turbulent place.

1430

Just to elaborate a little bit, my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock doesn't necessarily talk about his daughter's condition. We had not known each other very long when he came and showed me a photograph that Trish had taken. I had done a member's statement on congenital heart disease maybe two years or so ago, just after I was elected. Trish had attended Dr. Oechslin's office, saw the member's statement and took a photograph of it. Rick came and showed me that, and I thought how interesting it was that we stand up in this place and obviously want to celebrate residents in our ridings and important contributions to society, as we do in our members' statements, but that led to Rick's telling me his daughter's story.

Trish, I'm sure that not a day goes by without his thanks for the gift of your life. He's incredibly proud of you.

The member for Simcoe North apparently would like to attend the next Wyatt's Warriors fundraiser. I just want to make sure he doesn't feel that that's any kind of excuse to avoid his usual generous gift to his wife on Valentine's Day.

Of course, most of all, we'd like to thank our visitors here today, those members from the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance, the professionals working at the Hospital

for Sick Children and the Toronto General Hospital for what they do each and every day for what we've been able to discuss for some 50 minutes in this House, which is congenital heart disease, the world's leading birth defect. In this way, we have raised awareness, and we simply want to thank you for what you do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those visiting Queen's Park in the galleries today and those watching at home, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 100 minutes.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (TRANSFERS ON WIND UP), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (TRANSFERTS À LA LIQUIDATION)

Mr. Sterling moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act respecting transfers on wind ups / Projet de loi 213, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite en ce qui concerne les transferts à la liquidation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to lead off by saying that this bill was initiated at the request of many Nortel pensioners who are facing an uncertain future with respect to the pensions they now have in Ontario.

There are approximately 17,500 Nortel pensioners, and a good number of those reside in Ontario and are subject to the laws of Ontario. The scope of Bill 213 is very, very narrow; it deals with only one issue. That issue is: If the Nortel pension is wound up—which it probably will be, unfortunately—what are the choices left to the pensioners who are out there in Ontario?

Right now, there is only one option that the Financial Services Commission of Ontario can do on their behalf; that is, they can purchase a life annuity for these individuals. Unfortunately, life annuities are very expensive, and that means the benefits are very, very low. So it's a double hit to the pensioners of Nortel. If their pension is wound up, they will (1) not get 100% of the value, because the pension fund is underfunded, and therefore they may receive only 70% of the value of their pension, but (2) the second hit is that the only option available to them is a life annuity, and right now, with interest rates so low, life annuities will not yield much in the way of a monthly income to these pensioners.

As well, it was pointed out to me by the finance minister of the province, whom I talked to about this issue, that there isn't that much of a market for annuities at this time. So if, all of a sudden, there is a need to purchase 17,000 annuities in the province of Ontario, it will be very, very difficult to actually do that.

As well, I am told that there are other companies that may be facing the same fate as Nortel, and therefore there could be a need to buy even more annuities in the future.

There are other issues that are of great importance to Nortel pensioners. This would certainly not be their first choice. Their first choice would be to have their pension continue on, as is the case in the province of Quebec. That way, the pensioners would continue to receive their monthly payments, as they have in the past, and that would continue for at least five years, as is the case in the province of Quebec.

They would also have issues, as we found, at the federal level with regard to the priority of pensioners with regard to the bankruptcy proceedings. However, that's not in our jurisdiction.

They also have issues with regard to the pension benefits guarantee fund, which they fall under in our province, which is basically insolvent at this time. They are expecting that the pension benefits guarantee fund will help them with regard to the pension shortfall that they are going to suffer.

But I have not included, purposely, those particular issues in this bill. I have only included one issue, and that is the issue of the pensioner having an option with regard to what happens to his or her value after a pension would wind up.

I would like the option, which is included in my bill, to be added to what is there already; that is, the life annuity—to have the ability of the pensioner to choose a registered savings plan, commonly known as a RRIF, rather than take a life annuity. Under a RRIF, at least the pensioners could wait until the stock market regains its past glory and the economy comes back a little bit.

Under the current rules, when a company ceases to exist and its pension plan is wound up, there's only the one choice for pensioners, and that's a life annuity. However, if you're a pension plan member who is presently working for Nortel or you haven't yet received any pension payments, you actually have three choices. You have a choice of rolling what value you have in the pension fund over into another pension fund, which I expect Nortel employees will do—those who are lucky enough to get new employment with Ericsson, which bought part of Nortel. They will probably be able to roll over their value into that pension fund. As well, those people can also take on an RRSP or a RRIF. Or they could buy a life annuity. So they have three choices, whereas those who are receiving a pension only have the one choice, and that choice, a life annuity, is a very poor choice at this time because of what I mentioned before.

You might ask, "Why are you excluding these other issues from Bill 213?" I'm excluding them because it's my hope that the government side will see that this issue is of immediate importance.

The pensioner doesn't have any choice as to when the pension fund is wound up. The Financial Services Commission of Ontario, which is an arm's-length body from the government and from this Legislature and only acts on legislation—which would include Bill 213, if

passed—makes an objective determination as to when to wind up the pension fund. They wind up the pension fund when they believe that Nortel Networks is no longer going to exist.

1440

We heard this week that another part of Nortel was sold off. In the Ottawa newspapers there was an announcement that some of the land with regard to Nortel Networks in the former township of Nepean had been sold off. So I don't believe that this arm's-length body is going to have much choice but to claim in the very near future that this pension fund is at an end, unless there is some immediate intervention by the government.

We do not have any legislation in this House at this time intervening in this situation, save and except for my Bill 213. I really hope that members will allow this particular bill to pass and will also request that their respective House leader call this bill fairly early as we go on.

There can be arguments against the whole notion of giving an existing pensioner the alternative of a life annuity. That is the argument which could be put forward, and has been put forward in the past, that an existing pensioner might, if he got control of the money in a RRIF or a registered retirement savings plan, deplete the capital all at once.

We have had in our past history in this Legislature, in our governments, this paternalistic attitude toward pensioners with regard to the control of their own pension funds. That is the argument the government could put forward and say, "Well, we want to continue with this control over the pension funds of individuals as they go forward."

I think you have to balance that, number one, against the fact that that kind of paternalistic thought doesn't really exist with 70% of the people, who do not have defined benefit pension plans anyway. Most of the population has RRSPs or registered retirement plans as it is. At the present time, that 70% of our population does have control over their pension plans. They could deplete the principal all in one year if they chose to take it all out and pay all that tax.

Therefore, I think the argument, the paternalistic argument, of the past has really seen its day. We must say to seniors, "You are capable of handling your own pension fund. You are capable of determining how much you're going to withdraw each year," save and except, under federal income tax, at least in the instance when you hit your 72nd year, you have to take out 7.5%, and then roughly that amount rises to about 8.5% for the next 10 years of your life. Notwithstanding that, that is the argument against passing this particular bill.

The balance is: Do you want to give what I call inexplicable support to an old policy that is dated? That's one side of the ledger. On the other side of the ledger: Do you want to give Nortel pensioners, and other people who find themselves in this particular position, a very low monthly payment? Because the only instruments that can be bought on their behalf out of their share of the pension funds are life annuities, which are paying very little at this time.

I urge members: Please, please consider this very seriously. This is a tremendously important issue to the Nortel pensioners. They are distraught at this time. They need some hope. We need to help them just a little bit at this time. We need to consider those other issues in the very near future as well, and I look forward to the government bringing forward legislation in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm pleased to be able to take part in this debate. I want to congratulate my colleague for bringing forward this legislation and for trying to create some awareness of the tragic situation that Nortel employees, now many of them former Nortel employees, find themselves in. I also want to thank him for delineating some of the problems with the existing pension legislation in the province, which is very much responsible for the sorry situation that these Nortel workers find themselves in.

Having said that, I want to be very up front with my colleague in the Conservative Party and tell him I cannot support the bill, and I'll delineate my reasons for that in a minute.

I think this bill is timely because we are at a critical juncture in terms of people's pensions in this province. Almost a year ago, Harry Arthurs submitted his report to the government wherein he suggested far-reaching pension reforms. If the government had acted on the Arthurs report when it was submitted almost a year ago, perhaps some of the people who are in the Nortel situation would not be in as grave a situation as they're in now.

Let me go into some more of the details. First of all, I want to be very clear with my colleague in the Conservative Party as to why we think this solution is second-best. First of all, this bill would transfer the pension risk to the individuals. You're very much at risk of, "This investment might do well, that mutual fund might not do well," and the problem with that is most people have real difficulty today sorting out what is a good investment from a bad investment. Just look at all of those people—it's notorious now—who thought that Bernie Madoff was somehow a saviour in terms of providing pension opportunities. All kinds of well-meaning organizations turned over their money to Mr. Madoff and his associates, only to learn that he was enriching himself.

Closer to home, we have the sorry situation that's gone on in Montreal where, again, an individual who somehow had a sterling—sorry, Norm—somehow had very bright reviews as an investor, and all kinds of people turned over their life savings to this individual, and he literally enriched himself, leaving people without their life savings and without a pension. That is very much the sorry state that we find ourselves in.

Most people really have difficulty differentiating between mediocre investments and good investments. I could, I think, refer to some members and former members of this Legislature who took the modest RRSP

money that is allowed in terms of retirement benefits here and put it all into the dot-com companies just a few years ago, and now have discovered that their pension investments are not worth much.

That's the problem with this bill. It simply says to the individual, "You're on your own, and good luck to you." I think we have to do better.

Second problem: This bill creates what I call adverse selection risks for those who say, "Well, I'm not sure about what I should invest in so I'll just stay where I am." What I mean by "adverse selection risk" is, those who stay and wish to purchase annuities may be the riskier of the annuitants—again, driving up prices for those who remain. So it creates that kind of problem, too.

1450

Thirdly, to use pension benefits guarantee fund money to support these kinds of outcomes, I think, is again the wrong direction to take. Allowing pension benefits guarantee fund monies to go into questionable retirement savings vehicles is simply bad public policy.

What should be done? What should we as members here be doing? Most of all, what should the government be doing? Well, we really ought to take a look at what Quebec is doing, because I think Quebec has come forward with a superior plan. What Quebec is essentially saying is that they're prepared, as a matter of public policy, to provide some risk insurance—to share in the risk—so that former Nortel employees in that province will not be thrown to the wind and their pensions will not be thrown to the wind. I think it's a very creative solution by the province of Quebec, and I think we ought to be pursuing that here in Ontario.

To follow up on my colleague Mr. Sterling's earlier comments, it will not just be Nortel; there are dozens of other pension plans in this province that are going to face a very similar difficult situation, and I think that, as part of provincial policy, we ought to be looking at the direction Quebec has taken. Following the Quebec example would give the plan as a whole more leverage. It only stands to reason: A large pension fund has the ability to spread some risks internally, and as a result the pension plan members as a whole fare better. I am left to ask the question: Quebec has come up with a creative solution. What's wrong with the government of Ontario? Why can't the government of Ontario come up with a similar creative solution?

But Ontario needs to do far more, and let me use this opportunity to lay out what I think really needs to be done. Only 35% of Ontarians today are covered by an occupational pension plan. This means that there are all kinds of Ontarians who are, in effect, living for the moment, because when they do leave the workforce, they are simply not going to have sufficient income to retire and stay above the poverty line. This is going to be a really serious problem. I hear the government say every day that it's taking action to fight poverty. Let me tell you: What is growing in the background is a number of now middle-aged Ontarians who will not have the income to avoid falling into poverty when they leave the workforce or when they're forced to leave the workforce. Ontario ought to be taking action on that now.

The government argues that this should be done federally. Well, yes, it should be done federally. But the fact of the matter is that if you look at the federal government right now—a minority government situation—they have great difficulty setting out any sort of longer-term vision or longer-term plan. The reality is that Ontario is large enough—like Quebec; probably like British Columbia and Alberta—to go it alone. Ontario has sufficient population to be able to put in place a provincial pension plan and to put in place the regulatory body and the investment body to make it a success. I believe that's what we ought to be doing. This is exactly what we ought to be doing.

Again, this is not rocket science. The Arthurs report recommends the establishment of an Ontario pension authority that would have the capacity to look after the pooling, administering, investing and disbursing of stranded pensions, and have a larger role as well. In addition, we support the recommendation of Professor Arthurs that the level of monthly pension benefits eligible for protection by the pension benefits guarantee fund ought to be increased. We believe that the monthly guarantee covered by the PBGF should be increased to a maximum of $2,500 to reflect the effect of inflation on the original maximum of $1,000. Does that involve some challenges? Yes, it does. But these are not challenges that couldn't be overcome in the medium and the longer term.

These are some of the things which New Democrats believe need to be done and need to be done now.

I just want to go back to where I started. Mr. Sterling is dealing with Nortel workers and former Nortel workers. But let me tell you, if you look at, for example, all of those workers who have been laid off in the last four years in the forest sector, their pension funds are facing similar challenges. I suspect what we're going to see is that Quebec, once again, will come up with a creative solution, and Ontario, at least currently, offers no solution.

What I hope this debate enables us to do today is to take a broader perspective. There are literally hundreds of thousands of workers in this province, members of pension plans right now, who need to see serious pension reform. Otherwise, we are going to have hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people who have worked hard all their lives, who have paid their taxes, contributed to the community, have been very good citizens, but run the risk of living their senior years in poverty—and it is a very real risk.

I want to thank Mr. Sterling for bringing forward the bill and for enabling this debate to get started. But the solution he offers, I would argue, is second best. What we really need to see is serious pension reform on the part of the government of the day, and no more pointing the finger at the feds, no more stalling, no more studies and no more consultations.

Quebec is already offering some very creative solutions, solutions that I believe are going to work in the short term, the medium term and the longer term.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 213. I'd like to start by congratulating the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills and thanking him for bringing the bill forward.

The bill seeks to amend the Pension Benefits Act, and it's important that we have this opportunity to talk about pensions in Ontario. The global economic downturn has affected many companies. Many people who work in those companies, and the retirees who depend on their company pension plans, have real challenges.

In my riding of Mississauga South, I have been speaking with members of the Nortel retirees' protection committee, who have concerns about their pension and benefits plan. As you know, Nortel is currently under bankruptcy protection. As for federal legislation, its assets are in the process of being sold.

Even though the pension plan is still active and continues to be monitored by the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, what Nortel pensioners are telling us is that they're concerned about what will happen if the plan winds up. They're concerned because the Nortel plan has already lost about 30% of its value, and if the plan winds up, they will not be able to recover that value.

The member's bill would allow pensioners, upon windup, to have the commuted value of their individual pension plan transferred into a registered retirement account. Essentially they could opt out of the annuity that their plan gets converted to and put their share into their own savings plan.

I understand the member's motivations in bringing this forward and in trying to provide additional options to pensioners who find themselves in the unfortunate position of having their plans wound up.

There are, however, concerns about this particular suggestion. For example, many are concerned about the possibility that pensioners could face higher costs as a result. Today when a pension plan goes into windup, all retirees receiving a pension have the value of their plan commuted into an annuity. Under the proposed amendments, the costs of purchasing annuities for the retired members and surviving spouses would likely increase, as insurance companies incorporate self-selection among retirees, and a smaller risk pool, into the price. For plan sponsors, this could raise the costs of fully settling their benefits.

Retired members who wish to purchase an annuity on an individual basis at a later date would also face higher costs and lower payouts than if the annuity was purchased by the whole group. Individuals would also need to take on greater risk in order to pursue greater returns.

For those retirees who transfer the value of their plan into a retirement account, transfer limits under the Income Tax Act can result in large, taxable lump-sum payments when a commuted value is transferred into a locked-in retirement account, a LIRA, or a life income account, a LIF, which could, of course, reduce the value of the asset. So while I appreciate the member's motivation to provide additional options to pensioners, I'm concerned that the result of this change would be a reduced value of the pension assets.

1500

As mentioned earlier, I have been working with Nortel retirees in my riding to try to find ways to address their concerns about the potential windup of their plans. It's true that the federal legislation and ongoing legal proceedings play a role in determining the future of the Nortel plan. Somewhat outside of our control, there are initiatives ongoing at the federal level to address pension issues. An effort is under way in the House of Commons right now to get pensioners secured-creditor status in the event of a bankruptcy. Right now, pensioners are treated as unsecured creditors, which means they can only be paid after secured creditors like banks and other financial institutions and bondholders have been paid. Petitions have been submitted calling for the appropriate changes to be made to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. There is also a private member's bill before the federal House that would do just that. Pensioners in my riding are anxiously awaiting the outcome of these initiatives. I will also be watching closely as they develop.

Here in Ontario, we are responsible for the Pension Benefits Act, and what pensioners are asking for is measures that will prevent windup in the first place. By preventing windup, they would also have the opportunity to rebuild some of the lost value of their plans.

I'd like to quote now from an e-mail I received from the chair of the GTA's regional chapter of the Nortel retirees' protection committee. It reads as follows:

"The NRPC understands Bill 213 to purport, in a defined pension benefit plan windup, to give the individual members of the pension plan a choice of taking their pension entitlement as either (a) an annuity (as the law is today) or (b) as a commuted value.

"As you are aware, the focus and the intention of the NRPC has been, and will continue to be, advocating for a solution that does not wind up the pension plan (of far more immediate concern to us)"—to them.

"It is our position that the pensioners, caught in a bankruptcy such as Nortel's, will be much better served by having their pension plans remain open for a period of time (five to seven years) until the markets (and the pension funds) have recovered much of the loss experienced in the recent financial crisis.

"Only then would we consider the pension plans being wound up.

"Accordingly, Bill 213 would only impact our members a number of years into the future and so has received limited deliberations within the NRPC."

This is their quote: "I can say that we do foresee a number of critical concerns with the bill.

"Situations can be envisioned where the demographics of those taking CVs would negatively impact the fund value for those opting for annuities.

"In addition, our legal counsel"—that being Nortel's retirement counsel—"our actuary and certain other

groups ... all state that the bill is very poor in aggregate in that it will enrich the finance companies (notably because of high MERs) at the expense of those pensioners who opted for the CV."

In a follow-up e-mail, NRPC tells me that the bill "does nothing to address the primary situation that the members of many defined benefit pension plans currently face, that being underfunding." They also ask, "If the bill were to proceed, that it guarantee that 'actuarial evaluations' are made that would ensure that anyone who opts for a CV at windups does not do so at the expense of those that wish to take an annuity." That is an absolute necessity, and a guarantee that they request.

"While the bill might allow for individual decisions to take a CV at windup, the strong advice of NRPC to its pensioner group at large would be to take the annuity."

So I say again that I am very glad that the member brought this forward, as it gives us an opportunity in this House to debate the issues around pensions. They are important issues that are affecting thousands of Ontarians and many constituents in Mississauga South. I appreciate the concerns of Nortel pensioners, and for that matter all pensioners who face similar challenges, who are looking for ways to keep their plans out of windup. I agree that pension reform is needed, and needed urgently, to help the affected pensioners. And I agree with the Premier when I say that we also need a national pension strategy. I believe that the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills is coming to the debate with the best intentions and a sincere desire to improve the situations of pensioners and their families. I hope that he will remain engaged as we continue to explore ways to improve pension legislation in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Leeanna Pendergast): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very, very pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 213, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act respecting transfers on wind ups.

I want to, first of all, mention that I'm very pleased that my colleague has brought this forward. In my riding, we have approximately 150 Nortel retirees, and many of them have approached my office. I have to tell you that we're very late in the year and we've only got probably another eight or 10 days in the Legislature. The same thing will happen federally. As far as I know, between Ontario and Ottawa, this is the only piece of legislation that's actually being debated concerning pensions. I know the whole topic of pension reform seems to be on everybody's mind. I applaud the fact that my colleague has brought this forward and is actually dealing with the 18,000 Nortel retirees who make up the people who are approaching our offices almost every day.

I can tell you that under the current rules, when a company ceases to exist and its pension plan is wound up, pensioners or survivors of pensioners who are receiving a pension at that time must roll their share of the plan into a life annuity. Pension plan members who are not yet receiving a pension, on the other hand, can transfer the value of their pension into an annuity or into another pension plan, an RSP or an RRIF.

In the current economy, with historically low interest rates, annuities are worth very little. Unfortunately, this will leave thousands of pensioners receiving very little value for the pension they contributed to for so many years, forcing them to live on much less income than they are presently receiving.

The bill, if passed, will amend the rules to allow pensioners to transfer the value of the wound-up pension plan into a prescribed retirement savings arrangement or an annuity. This means they can benefit from an economic recovery by choosing a RRIF.

It is important that this bill pass quickly, and I repeat that: It is important that the bill pass quickly because the Nortel pension plan could be wound up at any moment. The Financial Services Commission of Ontario, an arm's-length body, makes the decision to do that when they determine that the company, in this case, Nortel, will no longer survive.

In preparing the bill, Mr. Sterling asked legislative counsel to consult with FSCO to ensure that the intent was contained in the legislation. He was completely open to amendments which would help to meet the intent of the bill.

Pensioners of Nortel have asked for this additional option should their pension plan be wound up. The bill would make this option available not only to Nortel pensioners but to other pensioners who find themselves in this unfortunate position in the future.

If the bill passes second reading, it is the intention, after consulting with the House leaders of all three parties and the legislators, to ask for unanimous consent for third and final reading shortly thereafter.

As the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has mentioned, this is by no means a comprehensive solution to all the issues surrounding our pension system. However, it is one simple change that, without costing Ontario taxpayers any money, would make a big difference for anyone receiving a pension from a company facing bankruptcy.

When we think back at these people who have worked for Nortel and companies like that over the years, if we look back 15 years, 18 years and we look at the kind of company Nortel was, a proud company that was driving the economy of the province, who would have ever thought this sort of thing would happen? However, these people who are now retired counted on that income as part of their compensation as a salary and now they may be in the unfortunate position of having very, very much less to live on as a result of the economic conditions.

As far as I can see at this point, the only person I know who's stepping up to the plate right now to try to help the Nortel pensioners is Mr. Sterling. He has already repeated over and over again that this is not the solution for all pension reform. However, it is a measure that would help Nortel employees and lay out an option on the floor.

1510

I just want to take a minute to show the kinds of letters I've been getting. Many, many of them came from my office, but I want to read this one:

"My wife and I attended the demonstration by Nortel retirees at Queen's Park on October 7.... There were between 1,500 and 2,000 people at the demonstration. Speakers ranged from Bob Ferchat, a former CEO of Nortel, to Ken Lewenza, head of the CAW.

"Speakers called on the Ontario government to support Nortel pensioners through the pension guarantee fund, and by not winding up the Nortel pension plan right away but to manage it for a period of five years until, hopefully, the economy and the pension fund is in better shape. (The Quebec government"—I think Mr. Hampton mentioned this—"has agreed to manage the plan for Nortel retirees who live in Quebec.)"

We haven't seen that kind of leadership coming from the Ontario government.

"The US and UK governments are guaranteeing the pensions of their Nortel retirees, and have submitted claims through the bankruptcy courts to recover this money.

"The Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada (NRPC) is asking the federal government to amend the bankruptcy laws to put former employees further up the priority list for fund distribution. There will be a demonstration in Ottawa on October 21.

"Neither the Ontario nor federal governments appear to be showing any interest in this issue.

"I know you"—referring to myself—"are interested in seniors' issues. There are nearly 150 Nortel retirees living in the riding of Simcoe North.

"Nortel retirees are not asking for a handout. They are just asking for help to get the pensions (i.e. their deferred wages) and benefits that they were promised when they were working hard to make Nortel the great company it used to be.

"Thank you for your help."

That came from a Nortel employee in my riding, whom I don't really want to identify by name on the record right now.

As I said earlier, I think the member from Mississippi Mills is trying his best to put something for debate in front of the House. It is an option we can look at. As he said earlier, it's not the final answer and the solution to all pension reform, but it's the only one that is being debated right now, and I'm very concerned that if this bill does not pass and we do not make some movement toward protection of these employees, then we may not see any kind of action in any of our Parliaments until long into the new year. I'd ask all members of the House to support Bill 213, and I'm very pleased to say that I will as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Talking about pensions is an important topic. I know this issue has been brought to this House many different times. My colleague before me spoke in detail about our government's position on this issue.

I know the member's intentions are great; he wants to help the pensioners. But I'm not sure we can help the pensioners in this way. We cannot create some kind of burden. We cannot go to a risky approach.

I listened to the member from the third party speaking about the risk approach in this regard. He talked specifically about the pensions we have in the province of Ontario. It's an outdated pension plan. It didn't work and it's not working, and will not work or remain the same way.

I believe this pension has to be reformed and has to be brought up to modern times. I think we need it badly, because it's not just Nortel retirees' issues here; it's many different companies. I know that a small company in my riding just went down. A lot of pensioners lost their pensions, because there is no structure in place to protect them. I think it's very important for us as a government to reform pensions across the province of Ontario. That's why our Premier asked Professor Harry Arthurs to conduct a report. As you know, he has great experience in this regard. I think he commissioned a report by 2009.

In this regard, our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, asked the federal government to come to the table in order to create a national pension plan for all the people who work in the province of Ontario, all the people working in Canada, because it is very important. As we go toward the future, we have to protect hard-working people. We want to protect people who put in their effort, their sweat, and want to protect their family after their departure, or their spouse, whatever happens to them.

It's a very difficult issue; it's very tough. I commend the member for bringing this issue forward to this House. I agree on the principle, but I'm not sure if this is the right approach to deal with pensions. I think the best approach is to start a new pension that speaks to the modern era in which we live and that speaks to the economic times in which we live. I think it's important to transform and reform pensions in general in conjunction with the federal government. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank my colleague Mr. Sterling for bringing this bill forward. There is a matter of urgency, which is why it is before the House now. We've heard honourable members make reference to the fact that pension legislation in this province should be reformed, that we need to approach pensions in a new way. That's all fine and good, but I think we miss the point of this bill if we wax eloquent about future discussions about reforming pension plans in this province. What we need to do here is deal with a matter that is affecting people who are caught. They're caught in a circumstance beyond their control.

It's important that we recognize that this is their money. These are funds that have been put aside on their behalf. There were contributions that were made to a pension fund that was intended for them in consideration of many years of work that they committed to this company, to Nortel. What is now for us to decide is whether these people should have the option—that's all

Mr. Sterling is asking—that these pensioners be given the option to take their retirement funds by way of an annuity, which is prescribed now for those pensioners who are already receiving a pension—and give those people the same rights that employees of that company have who have not started to receive their pension. We're simply asking for fairness.

To lock those pensioners into only one option, and that is to take a prescribed annuity, is to condemn those people for years to come at what are historically low interest rate returns. An annuity is a guaranteed return on investment. It is essentially a guaranteed interest certificate. Who in their right minds, for the next 10, 15 or 20 years, would lock into a 1.5% or 2% interest rate return today? No one in this room would do that. No one in this House would do that. Why would we, in that case, condemn people who are dependent on a retirement fund to be limited to that kind of return, which is all that annuities are going to afford them?

This legislation provides some hope. It provides some hope that those employees may elect to direct their retirement funds that have been accumulated into a retirement savings account, into a vehicle that allows them the benefit of an uptick in the economy, of larger returns. I just think it is the fair thing to do. I fail to understand why we would even question supporting this. I also fail to understand why we would question granting not only passage of this bill today in second reading, but to give immediate passage on third reading to this bill so that it can in fact receive royal assent, and so that these pensioners have a sense of security with regard to their future. It's the right thing to do. I'm pleased to support it, and I believe that not only will past employees of Nortel benefit from this but also other employees who are caught in the same circumstances in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have to say that the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills has brought forth a well-intentioned bill about a very serious issue, one in which I've heard concordance on all sides of the House on the need to be able to look into the future and say that we have to do what's right in pensions. With our generation of baby boomers all growing older, and in fact the earliest baby boomer turning 65 in 2011, this particular issue is going to not merely come back but be with us with greater and greater importance as the years go on.

1520

I think, in response, that the Harry Arthurs report tabled in mid-year, this year—in which Professor Arthurs was called upon to look at pensions in general—might disagree with Bill 213, not on its intent, because no one can quarrel with the intent of Bill 213, but in that it tries to make some rules on a case-by-case basis, where what Professor Arthurs clearly said was that major assessments are needed.

In this case, a large plan and group benefits tend to fare better in the long run, so our goal would be to help establish these conditions rather than, as the bill proposes, to facilitate, push or encourage individuals to go it alone. It does bring to mind the need for a pan-Canadian pensions regulatory framework that is sustainable in the long run, which, at the moment, the status quo is not. With that, I thank you for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Sterling, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I don't know whether you weren't listening to what I said in the first instance, but listen, this is not my first choice. This is not Nortel employees', pensioners', first choice. This is their last choice, and I understand that, but what I want to do is ensure that if this pension fund winds up in the next two or three months, before we meet again in February, pensioners will have another option than have an annuity forced upon them.

Mr. Frank Klees: That's all it is.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: That's all it is. If you don't like it when you bring forward your other pension legislation, which I would welcome and participate in, then nullify Bill 213 at that time. But please, please give these people the opportunity to save some of their pension funds should this thing be wound down in the next two to three months.

This isn't in the hands of the government to wind it down. It's not in the hands of Nortel to wind it down. It's the Financial Services Commission, which is legislated to determine objectively. When they determine Nortel is no longer going to exist, they have to wind it down because there are liabilities to not wind it down.

What's the objection? The objection from my New Democratic friend is that it doesn't address all of the other issues; it doesn't maintain the pension fund. I know Nortel pensioners would like to have the fund live on, as in Quebec. But if that doesn't happen and if we don't have legislation here to do it, for God's sake, give these people an option where they can buy an annuity in the future if the interest rates go up and they get a better monthly income.

Look, why wouldn't you say to them, "The annuity is going to take your pension from $30,000 a year to $10,000 a year—or do you want this to go into a registered retirement savings plan?" Why wouldn't you give them that choice?

Please, please consider it from that point of view. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on Mr. Sterling's ballot item in about 50 minutes.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES HÔPITAUX PUBLICS

Mrs. Albanese moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to amend the Public Hospitals Act to require the provision of information sheets to patients /

Projet de loi 216, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les hôpitaux publics afin d'exiger la remise de feuilles de renseignements aux malades.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is a pleasure to speak before the House today on my private member's bill, the Public Hospitals Amendment Act, 2009, otherwise known as Bill 216. Managing the health care system is perhaps the most important and sometimes challenging responsibility for the government of Ontario. This bill is concise, simple and effective in its content as it seeks to improve the way in which health care is delivered in this province, especially for those who are most vulnerable and least aware about existing health care options.

Offering treatment when the need arises in communities all over this province is something that all members of this Legislature support. To that end, I hope I can solicit the support of members present here today to endorse Bill 216.

But before getting into further detail, I would just like to say how proud I am to be living in a country where health care is not a privilege but a strongly guarded right that is shared by all Canadians. Indeed, our firm commitment to universal health care is a cornerstone of our identity as Canadians. We must continuously strive to make sure that our province delivers the best care possible for all people, irrespective of their background, income bracket, age or medical condition.

Having said that, it is incumbent upon us, as politicians to listen carefully to what the people we represent are telling us. It is incumbent upon us to improve access for people, directing them to the appropriate care they need in a timely fashion. We need to build on our foundation to work together to bridge the gaps in our health care system and make health care delivery patient-centred.

Over the past month and years, I have had ample opportunities to talk to residents in my riding of York South–Weston and to really delve into how they have experienced our health care system. As a result, I have identified some common issues which I believe we can help resolve through this bill.

In short, this bill is about encouraging and empowering patients to make use of the variety of health care services that are available locally, both inside and outside the walls of hospitals and emergency rooms. At times, patients are left wondering about where to turn to when they require rehabilitative or non-medical assistance.

If passed, Bill 216 would empower patients to make use of alternate points of access to health care by requiring hospital administrators to distribute patient information sheets outlining certain services available inside and outside the hospital setting. Some hospitals in our province already provide such information and do an excellent job; others have yet to reach that same level. This bill would ensure the same standard across the province.

For better or for worse, it remains the case that many hard-working Ontarians do not have the time or the opportunity to sit down and study the complexities of our health care system. Only when a medical emergency arises and they visit or are admitted to a hospital do they face the intricacy of the system. In such instances, hospitals are the go-to public institutions for the delivery of health care, and often the first point of contact for people. And if patients are not aware of their options within and outside of the hospital, should they relapse or suffer new medical problems, reverting back to the hospital is the most common practice. The result is a greater demand on hospital resources and staff.

This bill seeks to change that by giving patients an information sheet outlining different services available to them. In essence, the references contained in the patient information sheet will be threefold. First, it would contain information about the services available in the hospital itself, including the role of the patient's advocate and his or her contact information; how a complaint regarding services provided at the hospital may be addressed; the role of the community care access centre representative and his or her contact information in order to arrange for services, which might be needed as soon as the patient is discharged; it would also indicate support available for those with special needs in getting transport to and from the hospital; and, finally, information on financial and legal assistance available to patients with lower incomes.

The second part of the sheet would contain information about services available in the community, including what is offered by community care access centres outside of the hospital and providers of health care services after regular business hours, such as a walk-in clinic or pharmacies.

Finally, each patient information sheet would also contain references to two universally run provincial programs: Telehealth Ontario, the free and confidential telephone service where people can call and obtain health advice from a registered nurse, and Health Care Connect, the phone-in service that matches family health care services to families and individuals without access to a family doctor.

1530

Taken together, all these specific references would be handed to the patient in a single document upon his or her admittance; and more importantly, once the patient leaves the hospital, he or she would be able to access the services available in the community. The benefit would be that residents won't always have to go back to the hospital. What better way to empower patients than to place directly in their hands the information they need on a single sheet, website addresses, telephone and fax numbers included?

Despite living in a technologically advanced age, we must recognize that not all Ontarians in all parts of the province have access to the Internet. This is especially an issue among low-income earners, seniors, newcomers with language barriers and many living in rural commun-

ities. That is why providing this simple piece of paper would result in getting the access that is needed.

This initiative is not very costly at all. It only requires hospital administrators to conduct periodic updates of the information they present. Patient information sheets could, of course, vary from hospital to hospital and from region to region, reflecting the reality of the communities they serve. For instance, hospitals may choose to draft a version of the sheet in a foreign language to suit the needs of a particular community. As MPPs we cannot legislate every aspect of individual behaviour, but we can raise awareness and encourage our citizens to seek out what they need if they experience medical issues or challenges. The patient information sheet would provide points of contact that some patients might not use immediately but very well might find useful in future situations.

In time, some of the pressures that front-line doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers are under would be alleviated. I believe that this legislation does a good job of complementing our health care system, because it would redirect more people to specified care, even non-medical care, and would over time increase awareness about community services that people would be able to make use of. It would also increase the profile of community care access centres and the important work that they do on a daily basis, serving the needs of 14 regional areas in our province.

The Toronto Central CCAC alone serves 21,000 people and employs 500 health professionals. It's vitally important to make people aware of the important work done by community care access centres and other organizations that help people to cope with physical, medical and personal challenges in their daily lives. In a recent article, Carol Goar of the Toronto Star referred to CCACs as "gatekeepers of the non-institutional health care system." I believe we must do all that we can to get the services CCACs offer to those who need them most. Services offered by CCACs and their local partners are manifold: They include offering therapeutic care to people who have undergone surgery, providing patients with medical equipment, helping seniors with household chores like shovelling snow or grocery shopping, and offering palliative care to those who need it.

In one particular case in my riding of York South–Weston, an elderly gentleman by the name of Francesco Alfano suffered a stroke back in March. Upon being treated and released from a hospital outside the constituency, Mr. Alfano and his wife, Lidia, did not know where to turn for the corollary care he needed. The hospital did not connect him to a CCAC right away. Mr. Alfano had to get in touch with my office to get the right referral before receiving the appropriate respite care he needed. He is now seeing a therapist twice a week in his home, thanks to the arrangements made by the Central West CCAC. The therapist is helping Mr. Alfano recover his physical and mental strength so that he and his wife can return to a quality of life that is closer to the one they enjoyed before the stroke.

In this case, the constituent in question inquired about post-operative care options by contacting my office. Cases like these could be many throughout the province of Ontario, and if this bill passes the Legislature, patients and their families would be empowered to seek the services already available to them and jump-start their path to recovery. This bill would be good for hospitals, good for CCACs, good for doctors and nurses and, above all, beneficial to patients in Ontario.

I would like to thank my staff for their help in the research and their assistance in drafting this bill. Fellow members, I encourage you to endorse Bill 216, the Public Hospitals Amendment Act, 2009. Let's empower Ontarians to make use of what is available and to lead healthier and longer lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 216, An Act to amend the Public Hospitals Act to require the provision of information sheets to patients. This bill proposes to amend the Public Hospitals Act by adding a section that would require a hospital administrator to ensure that each patient arriving at the hospital is given an information sheet outlining the services available at the hospital, in the community, as well as other provincial health services one could access for support. This bill aims to promote transparency in the hospital system by making key contacts in a hospital and its surrounding community readily available on a single document to incoming patients.

I would like to start by indicating that I do appreciate the sentiment behind the bill, but unfortunately, I won't be able to support it for reasons that I will now get into. The PC Party of Ontario and our caucus encourage transparency and accountability in health care delivery and, for that matter, in any system that is funded by public dollars. This party has long advocated that taxpayers' money be spent responsibly and for the benefit of all taxpayers. This would include the premise that taxpayers have the right to be aware of any and all services available to them, provided within our hospital and community health care system. Patients have the right to access the services they are paying for and the right to have the best-quality experience possible throughout their journey within the health care system.

With that said, I feel it is very important to acknowledge that while very well intentioned, this bill won't do much more than increase red tape on an already overburdened hospital system.

Hospitals are under tremendous pressure right now to balance their budgets and are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. As a result, as we know, many hospitals are expected to have to cut services in order to balance those budgets. It's unrealistic to expect that hospitals can further divert scarce resources from front-line service.

It should also be noted that most of the information listed in the bill to be provided on a sheet is currently already available by calling the switchboard at the

hospital in question; on websites for the hospital; at the first point of contact within the hospital system; through government advertising campaigns, such as Telehealth Ontario; and Health Care Connect.

I also had a chance to consult with the Ontario Hospital Association regarding this legislation. They agree that the spirit of this bill is certainly admirable, and I commend the member for bringing the issue forward. The Ontario Hospital Association, however, has made some good suggestions which I think we could consider on this topic moving forward.

First, given that the LHINs are responsible for integrating services within each of their mandated areas, the OHA has suggested that the LHINs may be a more appropriate venue from which to coordinate this information. I could certainly support that idea.

I should also point out that there are two websites that are quite informative. One is run by the Ministry of Health and one by the Ontario Hospital Association. The ministry site, called "Your Health Care Options," showcases a multitude of community and public health services that are accessible to Ontarians, including Health Care Connect; Telehealth Ontario; a medical services directory that locates walk-in clinics, urgent care clinics and tips on finding a family health provider; CCACs and the services they provide; diabetes education; and much more. The OHA's myhospitalcare.ca site is designed to make public information about hospitals both accessible and useful to prospective and returning patients and their families.

In conclusion, I support the member's intention with respect to this bill, but unfortunately, I cannot support it in its present form. We are committed to full transparency in our health care system. All Ontarians should be fully informed about health care programs and services, both in the hospital and in the community, but I believe this information is already available. Duplicating this effort in the manner suggested by this bill is not, in my view, the best use of our already scarce hospital resources.

1540

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a privilege to stand in this House, particularly to speak about health care.

As a Canadian—a number of us were down at the state legislators' conference in the United States recently. It was interesting that there were very few Canadians there—all parties were represented—but a lot of Americans, and all the Americans wanted to speak about was, guess what? Our health care system. They wanted the facts rather than the fiction that they were being fed, often through their news media. It was a delight to really play a rather diplomatic role and to tell them that some of the myths they'd heard about the Canadian health care system were just that, myths; and to tout again one of the wonders and joys of being Canadian, which is that we have a health care system. Thank you, Tommy Douglas.

With that, I'm going to talk about the bill.

I want to say to the member from York South–Weston that I will support this bill. I think it's a little step.

I heard the member from Whitby–Oshawa, and she made some excellent points. Unfortunately, it will cost a bit of money to put something like this into place. That would be the challenge I would give to the folk across the aisle, the government: that hopefully if they do move this bill forward and it does become in some way law, that there is funding available as well. The last thing our hospitals need is the necessity for providing yet another service with no more dollars to provide it. So absolutely I would say that has to be part of the regulations that attach themselves to this bill, were it to get to committee and move on from there.

It's interesting that as New Democrats, one of the real shortfalls we see in the health care system certainly does have to do with information—actually, there are two shortfalls. One of them is the fact that the Ombudsman does not have oversight over hospitals. In fact, the Ombudsman doesn't have oversight over any of the MUSH sector. This is unfortunate. Our researchers did some study on this, and it absolutely staggered me to know that 2,366 complaints to the Ombudsman had to be turned away because they involved municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals and long-term-care homes. Children's aid societies and police also are not covered. The reality here is, where do you go when you have a complaint about treatment that you've received at the hospital? We brought forward a private members' bill or two on this topic—certainly, it has the support of the Ombudsman, who would like to see his staff enabled to look into complaints about the health care sector. Every other province has this provision. Every other province has Ombudsman oversight of their health care, of the hospitals and long-term-care homes. We don't. In fact, it was my cousin who came to talk about my uncle's death from C. difficile here who really highlighted the program. Cast our minds back to the C. difficile issue and the lack of transparency on behalf of this government and the lack of oversight by the Ombudsman. It was—and she said it most eloquently—very, very difficult even to find out a diagnosis as to why her father had died. This is unfortunate. It's worse than unfortunate. We need Ombudsman oversight.

In terms of sharing information, I would say that not only should the hospital, once you are admitted, give you information about where to get the services and perhaps supplies that you need once you're discharged and while you're in the hospital's care, but they should also provide you with the health records. This is a huge oversight that we have—quite staggering to other jurisdictions.

Another story: My husband, playing on the Legiskaters, had a heart attack, unfortunately. It was a mild one, which we were glad about. He went into the hospital, and then when he did the follow-up visit with our family doctor, lo and behold, the family doctor didn't even know that he'd had a heart issue. The records had not got from St. Mike's to our family doctor.

The sharing of health care records, the access to health care records, is a serious problem in this province. In fact, the whole eHealth scandal is particularly scandalous not only for the money that went out the back door in untendered contracts but because, at the end of the day, we don't have eHealth records. We don't have a seamless method of sharing information from one doctor to another, from one specialist to another, from one health care institution to another. We don't have that in Ontario, and that's dangerous. That is really quite dangerous.

Another friend of mine has heart issues as well. She has taken to carrying her records around under her arm, literally; all this paper—you can imagine—a file folder like this. She carries it from one specialist to the other because that's the only way that she can be sure that the specialist will know what the GP said, the GP will know what the specialist said and the hospital will know what the specialist said. This is absurd.

She's not the only one. My adoptive mother, who passed away recently of bone cancer, had to do the same thing. She had to do it on the TTC, and she was a woman of 76. She had to carry X-rays under her arm from one clinic to another, from specialist to GP.

We are in the 21st century now. There has to be some way—this is not rocket science—of sharing information in a way that makes sense for patients. But presumably that's not the case in the province of Ontario.

What else is problematic? Certainly, apart from Ombudsman oversight, we in the New Democratic Party are very happy about the work our Ombudsman does. We think he's very non-partisan. We think he looks at issues very judiciously. We would like to give him the power to look at the health care system in the same way, on behalf of those who use it, and also medical advisory councils. We heard a wonderful submission, while looking at another bill in this House, from the RNAO, the nurses' association. They would like to see more involvement of nurses, midwives and other health care professionals on the medical advisory councils in the hospitals. In some ways, it really is still a pretty archaic, hierarchical system in our hospitals. We in the New Democratic Party would like to see that democratized a little bit so that other health care professionals can also have insight into the care of the patients within the hospital setting. That's certainly what the nurses, midwives, dietitians, nutritionists and others would like to see happen.

Then, of course, there's the question of health care itself. Tommy Douglas always said that every generation would have to refight the battle for medicare. That has been proven to be true. And he said that you can never rest; you always have to be improving the system because otherwise, again, it will be chipped away and privatized in pieces. He has been proven to be correct about that as well.

We in the New Democratic Party would like to see some extensions. This government promised a dental program. We don't see that dental program. In fact, in my CCHC in my riding—a wonderful one, Parkdale Health—they set aside a little room, waiting for the funding from this government, to be able to offer dental care for those in their community who can't afford it and who desperately need it. We're not talking about providing beautiful white smiles; we're talking about the kind of basic dental care that will make you ill if you don't get it, that will take you to the emergency ward at some point if you don't get it.

Again, it would seem to us in the New Democratic Party that this is just common sense. Why would you not pay for simple dental examinations, simple extractions, simple fillings, simple checkups, but you will pay for extremely expensive emergency ward work? This makes no economic sense to us.

The government brought forward a bill and made a promise. We don't see that promise fulfilled. We don't see a dental chair in that little room set aside in Parkdale Health, and we don't see a dentist there. We still see people walking around in my community with extremely unhealthy teeth, which impacts their health. Let's look at that as well.

Overall, I have to say that while this is a good step—sometimes you feel like a broken record in this House, saying this over and over again, because it's true of just about every Liberal, McGuinty government bill: good step, but it's an inch where we need a yard, a millimetre where we need a kilometre, right? It's the same here.

But I commend the member for bringing it forward, because a small step is better than no step. I know the constraints on backbenchers. We know as well as anybody that the only decisions that happen in this place, that get enacted, come out of the corner office, come out of the cabinet. We'd like to see the backbench in the Liberal Party given a little bit more power, given a little bit more voice, to speak up at their cabinet meetings and get a little bit more of an ear from their Premier.

1550

We've seen some of this in action. In fact, last private members' day, last Thursday, we had a tie vote—miracle of miracles in this House—that the Speaker himself had to cast a deciding vote on. I wouldn't use the word "rebellion," but we're starting to see some real backbone in backbenchers, and I would like to encourage that. I would like to encourage that backbenchers bring forward bills of real substance, bills that maybe challenge what comes out of the corner office. Why not? Because, quite frankly, it's not the corner office that elects them; it's their own constituents.

This member, to her credit, is reacting and acting on behalf of her own constituents. Would that were the case for all Liberal backbenchers about all issues. I won't go into the HST; we speak enough about it. I'll speak more about it in the time allocation motion that's coming up. But again, that's an issue where, wouldn't it be wonderful—I'll hesitate to break into song, but wouldn't it be wonderful if the backbenchers brought forward the voices of their constituents on the HST? Wouldn't it be wonderful if the backbenchers brought forward some of their voices to the corner office, to the cabinet, that perhaps are in complete contradistinction to what comes

out of cabinet? That looks good to the electorate. Constituents like that. They re-elect members who do that. They re-elect members who don't just vote in unison, but who actually bring their own concerns forward.

In conclusion, will I support it? Yes, I will. Would I like to see it go further? Yes, I would. But again, I commend the member for at least representing and standing up for her community the way we'd love to see other backbenchers stand up for theirs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate.

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir aujourd'hui de me mettre debout pour soutenir ma collègue l'honorable Laura Albanese, députée provinciale de la circonscription de York South–Weston. Je la félicite pour avoir proposé ce projet de loi pendant la période des membres privés.

Ce projet de loi est important parce qu'il exigera que les administrateurs des hôpitaux provinciaux de l'Ontario s'assurent que chaque malade reçu à l'hôpital puisse avoir un document informatif sur les services disponibles à l'hôpital, les services dans la communauté et les autres options pour les soins de santé.

I rise first of all, of course, to commend my honourable colleague Laura Albanese from the riding of York South–Weston for bringing forward Bill 216, the Public Hospitals Amendment Act. Although that is the official title, I think it might also be called the patient information act because of the number of different questions and concerns that I think this addresses. And, yes, as the member from Parkdale–High Park said, it is part of the measures or steps brought forward to inform and empower the public.

First of all, as you consider the scenario of families taking loved ones to various emergency rooms or urgent care centres across Ontario, you can imagine that the time is one of disorientation, bewilderment and fright, and, of course, really not having their bearings right. So if we, as a government, can move forward and empower individuals with information particularly, because that's especially key in this domain, then of course all the various interests can be served.

In particular, what my colleague from York South–Weston is referring to is that, on entry to an emergency room/department, there should be an information sheet, information passed to the family or to the patients, not only to alert them as to what particular services are available at that moment within the hospital, but also the very important aspect of aftercare. As a doctor, I can tell you that when people present to an emergency room, whether it's for leaving a part of themselves, such as an appendix, or having cardiac bypass surgery or, let's say, angioplasty of the heart, a knee replacement or any of a host of procedures, that is actually just a part of the middle of the continuum of care. It may have started at the family physician level, then entering hospital, but probably the real bulk, the real re-strengthening, the real rehabilitation, actually occurs after hospital care.

One of the things that I think all of us, as members of Parliament, have found, whether it's in the health care domain or beyond, is that there is a myriad of services that the government of Ontario and all its boards, commissions and agencies together offer to the public, but unfortunately, to this day, the broader public is probably not aware of them and how to access them. Is it through community care access centres? Are there other points of access? Is it through the Internet? Is it calling members of provincial Parliament? How does one actually access these various services? If people who are in extreme need and who no doubt are going through difficult, challenging and disorienting times can be empowered with that type of information, it will really expedite the efficiency, the efficacy and the on-the-ground effectiveness of the health care domain.

So I would commend my honourable colleague from York South–Weston for bringing forward Bill 216, the Public Hospitals Amendment Act or, as I like to refer to it, the patient information empowerment act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I would like to compliment the member from York South–Weston for bringing this bill forward. Yes, I'd like to speak for a couple of minutes, and yes, I'd like to support it, as this moves a bit closer to bringing very much needed information into the hands of our patients.

One very important thing, when we look at the meaning of the legislation the member has introduced, is that it is not so-called access to health care as we know it. As a matter of fact, the information she is looking to provide should be provided even before someone accesses a hospital room or a hospital bed, so that not only patients but family members are immediately aware of what is available. What is better than providing someone with peace of mind when they are sick in a hospital room by saying, "Okay, you probably will be out of here in two or three days, and we suggest that you contact so-and-so and so-and-so."

Governments are wonderful at making all kinds of laws and then stashing them on various shelves, and unless you go and get them—like the member from Whitby–Oshawa said, the information is there; you've got to Google it; you've got to call; you've got to do this; you've got to do that. Come on.

The first one to call is not the person who has just been released from a hospital bed; it's probably a family member, and we do get calls. I'm sure that members get calls that say, "My father, sister, son"—whatever—"has just been released from hospital. We need this, this and this. Where can we go? Where can we call? Is anything available? How much?" I don't think it costs very much to provide a little bit of care, a little extra level of care, and make our patients feel much better, knowing where they have to go, what they have to do and whom to call, either before or even after.

I don't think this goes for our own immediate community; I think it is for people all over Ontario. In many places, they have to travel far and wide before they can access some services. There could be nothing better than

to provide those patients and family members with peace of mind: "Yes, this is what's available." As the member from Whitby–Oshawa said, we have all of this available. Yes, it is. But there is always that "but." When you need it, it's not there; it's not at your fingertips.

The information that the member from York South–Weston is trying to tell us about doesn't really cost very much. It does not cost millions or hundreds of thousands; it doesn't cost thousands. It can be done very, very cheaply, but it's very important. I think we should move on, move ahead and provide our people with this level of care, if you will, because it's another level of accessibility to health care services. Let's make it as easy as possible, especially in times of need.

I'm going to say this, and I'll probably repeat it another time: It's better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it.

1600

So I hope that we can second the legislation proposed by Ms. Albanese, the member for York South–Weston, move it along, and provide our people with much-needed necessities by increasing the level of care, the quality of care and the accessibility to care.

I thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to speak on Bill 216, the Public Hospitals Amendment Act, 2009, which was brought by my colleague the member from York South–Weston. It's an important issue.

I listened to all the people who spoke before me, talking about many different issues. The member from York South–Weston mentioned some important things. When a person goes to the hospital because of sickness, for operations, the issue is that it has to be easier for them to realize there are more services, not just within the hospital but outside the hospital, whether it's a community care access centre or other providers that exist outside the hospital. It's important because when you are sick, when you are tired, you have no time to search and navigate the system to find all the services.

I want to give you an example. I represent London–Fanshawe. In my city, we have three hospitals. We have the University Hospital, we have St. Joseph's hospital, and we have the London Health Sciences Centre hospital. All of them provide services for the people of London and the region. Every one of them has specific services for specific medical procedures. So it would be important for the people who come from London, or outside London, to know what kind of procedures each hospital provides, and also, if they are sick after the procedure, after they leave the hospital, that they can seek support and benefit. Especially in this day and age, we try as much as possible to lower the pressure on the acute bed services and send people out with some kind of support. It's important to provide that information to the patients when they go to the hospitals.

I don't think this bill will cost any money. Basically, it costs nothing. The member from Parkdale–High Park mentioned that this would put a burden on the hospitals, an expense, so we have to attach some money to it. I bet it wouldn't cost a dollar per day for every hospital across the province of Ontario, because it's basically a printed-out paper, a sheet.

When you're admitted to the hospital, the hospital will come forward and tell you, "Look, we'll provide these services: one, two, three, four, five. If you are released, then you can proceed with the services outside, whether it's a nurse coming to your house or a community care access centre." I think it's very important.

I want to commend the member from York South–Weston for raising such an important issue. I know many people are not paying attention to it. It will help us, as Ontarians and as patients, or future patients, in many different hospitals, to know what services we can get from the hospitals and what kind of services we can receive when we leave the hospitals. Then we can be comfortable.

Not all people are computer-savvy, as she mentioned. They can't navigate the system and go on the computer and know exactly which hospitals can provide better service than others, which ones have lower wait times.

It will be important to make it easier for the patients. I think it's important for the patient, on one side, and also for the health care provider, on the other. There will be fewer questions, fewer concerns.

Most of the time, when you go to the hospital and you are sick, you want to get well fast and you are concerned about your state of health. That's why you keep asking the doctor questions and you require many different nurses to come visit you: because you want to have peace of mind. In this way, when we provide the information for the patient or the people who care for the patient, when they come with them, they'll know exactly what to ask for and what can be provided. I think it's important.

I've visited the hospitals two or three times in London. I was sometimes puzzled about how much things would cost: If I asked for this room, would it cost me money?; was this one provided by OHIP or not? All this information shouldn't be a concern for the patient. It should be already provided.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, the honourable member, Mrs. Albanese, has up to two minutes for her response.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to thank all the members who have spoken on this bill: the members from Whitby–Oshawa, Parkdale–High Park, Etobicoke North, York West and London–Fanshawe. I appreciate their comments and their concerns.

I would like to reiterate that this bill is about linking patients to information that is, many times, already available. The hospital is the first point of contact for people at times. Many hospitals already do this. It's about creating a standard across the province. I believe the member from Whitby–Oshawa also mentioned websites that are available, and that's very true. Not everyone has access to a computer, however, and again, this would be an attempt at creating a standard.

Just like my colleagues, I'm well aware of the pressures that our hospital health care providers are under, and the patient information sheet aims, in a very simple and inexpensive way, to empower patients with information that would avoid their going back to the hospital. I believe that this legislation does a good job of complementing our health care system because it would redirect more people to specified care—even non-medical care—and would, over time, increase awareness about services that are available within the hospital setting and in the community, services that people would be able to make use of.

Therefore, I thank everybody who has spoken on the bill. Thank you very much. I look forward to their support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has not expired. That two and a half hours will be up at 4:13, so this House stands suspended until 4:13.

The House suspended proceedings from 1606 to 1613.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Members, please take your seats. The time provided for private members' public business has now expired.

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR DE LA SENSIBILISATION À LA CARDIOPATHIE CONGÉNITALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item 49, standing in name of Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Jaczek has moved second reading of Bill 178, An Act to proclaim February 14 in each year as Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Ms. Jaczek, do you have a preference for committee?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill go to the standing committee? So ordered.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (TRANSFERS ON WIND UP), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (TRANSFERTS À LA LIQUIDATION)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item 50, standing in the name of Mr. Sterling.

Mr. Sterling has moved second reading of Bill 213, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act respecting transfers on wind ups. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

After the next ballot item, we will call in the members.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES HÔPITAUX PUBLICS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item 51, standing in the name of Mrs. Albanese.

Mrs. Albanese has moved second reading of Bill 216, An Act to amend the Public Hospitals Act to require the provision of information sheets to patients. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Which committee would it go to?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): So ordered.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1615 to 1620.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (TRANSFERS ON WIND UP), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (TRANSFERTS À LA LIQUIDATION)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Sterling has moved second reading of Bill 213. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the clerk.

Ayes

Dunlop, Garfield	Klees, Frank	Witmer, Elizabeth
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	
Hardeman, Ernie	Sterling, Norman W.	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Best, Margarett	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Zimmer, David
Dhillon, Vic	Moridi, Reza	
Dickson, Joe	Pendergast, Leeanna	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 7; the nays are 31.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2009, on the motion for time allocation of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly it's a pleasure to speak about any bill that at least—and again, I find myself repeating myself over and over again—is an inch forward, although we in the New Democratic Party would like to see far more than an inch in this area.

But I have to say, it's not a pleasure to speak about time allocation motions ever. We in the New Democratic Party would like to see fulsome debate on all bills. We think that's part of democracy; that's part of transparency. It just so happens on this particular bill that we support it. I'm going to be voting for it and I'm going to talk about it, because it's a chance again to revisit the issue. It's such an egregious issue, and there are so many stakeholders still being so hurt by the lack of any kind of legislation that helps them that we really do need to move on this, although not as quickly as the government would like without fulsome debate.

First of all, I want to perhaps sketch out what it looks like—the experience of a nanny who comes to Canada under current legislation. Think about it. Most nannies in my riding and probably most nannies in your riding come from the Philippines. So a woman is approached in the Philippines or approaches a broker to come to Canada for a job caring for someone else's children. She leaves her family, she leaves her friends, she has to pay a substantial amount of money now—and, quite frankly, unfortunately, even after the passage of this bill, one of our concerns is that those immigration brokers over in the Philippines or in other countries will still be charging money and our jurisdiction won't catch that and this bill won't catch that. So here's a woman who is paying substantial amounts of money still to come here, to get her paperwork done, whether it's absolutely necessary that she do it or not. Unfortunately, the reality is, most of them still pay money in other lands to come here. For most of these women, it represents maybe their life savings, a substantial amount of money for them—perhaps a year's worth of salary in many, many instances.

They come here and they are introduced to their family. They are, again, separated out from other workers who do the same work, except perhaps when they meet with their charges or with their children in parks or through caregiver associations, and thank goodness for caregiver associations. But they are isolated in a home. Think about the working conditions of a nanny, particularly a nanny who is not from here, for whom Canadian ways, Canadian habits, are totally foreign, and who is already, of course, estranged from her family and possibly her own children. Remember, one of the reasons that most women come over to take positions looking after other people's children is to be able to send money back home, to help them back home.

So here they are in a home with strangers, isolated. They don't know for the most part, usually, about our employment standards. Certainly they come from places where there are very different employment standards, if any. So they are working here. They don't know what's allowable under the law or not. Part of this bill that we would like to see strengthened is that educational process, that nannies should know what their rights are under employment standards, that they should know about their right to work only a certain number of hours a week or get overtime, that they should be provided with the basics in terms of food and lodging, that they shouldn't be asked to polish shoes or scrub floors when they've been hired to look after children.

These broad employment standards need to be translated, first of all, into their own language, but at least given to them in the language of this country, in English, and it must be made clear to them how they can lodge a complaint.

Of course, we have in opposition talked about this as the Ruby Dhalla bill, because it came out of that particular instance where two nannies had the incredible courage to come forward. Remember, they came forward to cabinet ministers complaining about a federal member of Parliament, a former employer. Imagine the kind of courage that takes for women who are, as I said, usually quite isolated one from the other and who usually don't know their rights under the law. So these women came forward and complained about ill treatment in the Dhalla household, and, of course, a scandal emerged from this.

The next thing we know, we've got this bill in front of us that at least addresses part of the problem. It does, to be fair, address part of the problem, and that is the fees that are charged to them on this side of the ocean—not necessarily the fees that may be charged to them on the other side of the ocean, but the fees that are charged to them here. Quite frankly, and I have to say it, we think all fees charged to folks seeking work should be illegal—all fees. In fact, they were. I used to be in the business—that was prior to 2001—and fees were illegal back then. The fact that they were legal even for a brief period of time is particularly discouraging. So at least it addresses that one small piece.

There are a couple of issues that still have not been addressed. One is, what happens in the coverage of

employment standards for the nannies now working? The question really is, to get back to the Ruby Dhalla situation, would this bill have helped those nannies? My contention, unfortunately, and I hate to say it, is that it wouldn't. It would have maybe helped them if they had paid fees, but it certainly wouldn't have helped them with the abuse they experienced in that household. It wouldn't have helped them enforce the employment standards to which we know, as Ontarians, they are entitled, but to which they didn't know they were entitled and it wouldn't have helped them in the sense that the best possible protection for live-in caregivers in this province would be the ability to form a union. That right, the right to collectively organize and negotiate, is not given to live-in caregivers. We don't understand why that right is not part of this bill.

It's been explained to me in briefing notes from the government that, well, they're isolated. There's one here, one there. That's even more to the point that they need organization, that they need a collective bargaining voice to address some of the ills that they face in these work situations.

1630

I also have to say that I haven't heard any news from the Ministry of Labour about that case. What happened to the complaints of those two nannies about their treatment at Ruby Dhalla's? What happened? That falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Labour. It would be interesting to have a report, to know if an investigation has been done—it was promised to be done—and what that investigation found, and if these women, after all they have been put through—and, my goodness, they've been put through a lot, travelling to Ottawa, testifying, not only to the initial abuse itself but speaking to two cabinet ministers about another member of Parliament; that took some courage. I for one, and I'm sure many in the opposition, would like to know what happened. What was the outcome of that case? What was the outcome of that investigation?

I would ask the Minister of Labour to please respond and let us know. This is not before the courts. This is before the Minister of Labour, presumably before his investigators. Was anything established? Was any recompense given to these women? Surely, I hope it has been. Again, it would be nice to know.

Getting back to this bill, however, certainly one of our major concerns is the isolation and the fact that, quite frankly, for many nannies who come in, for many live-in caregivers, there is no knowledge of their whereabouts. Think about how isolated and how vulnerable that makes someone. So someone arrives, let's say, from the Philippines and moves into a household of strangers. Nobody knows she's there. In fact, if something happened to her, medically speaking, she wouldn't have any OHIP coverage. That might have been a point of contact, but there's no OHIP coverage for the first three months. For the first three months, basically what we're saying to this live-in caregiver is, "You're on your own. Good luck. We don't know where you are. We don't know that you're here. Good luck." Unless the employer decides to let someone know that she's there—usually it's she—there's no way of knowing. This is something else we look forward to amending the bill about.

We wanted to see the kind of situation they have in Manitoba. In Manitoba they have a licensing system. If you want to have a foreign live-in caregiver—in fact, if you want any foreign worker; this could go for the agricultural sector as well—you need to let somebody know this person is in your house and in your employ. You simply need to register their existence. It's really quite shocking that we don't have that in Ontario, because employment standards—this bill, all of it, could have absolutely no impact at all on a nanny if she doesn't know these bills exist, or that employment standards exist, for that matter, and that she has any right to anything. Lord knows what kind of abuse is going on currently, right now as I speak, in homes because the information is not disseminated and because there's no oversight of any sort on this whole branch of labour.

Of course, the backdrop to this branch of labour—the exploitation of this sort of labour, which this bill purports to address—is the fact that we, as working women in this province, don't have recourse to child care. Quite frankly, if you have two or more children and they both need child care, you are better off and almost have to have a live-in caregiver, because if you go out and pay for child care—if you can find it, because only one in 10 children in Ontario actually has access to a space—it's going to cost you over $1,000 a month per child. So unless you're earning quite a hefty salary, it's almost not worth it economically to work, if you're a woman. That's why many working women look to hire a live-in caregiver—and no one blames them for it—because it's simply the most economical way of looking after their children. Again, this points back to the lack of alternatives for working women in the realm of child care.

I just came from speaking to women who work in shelters and interval houses. I said that domestic violence is going to be a reality in this province as long as we live and as long as our grandchildren live, unless women can have some degree of economic independence. Unless a woman has economic independence, there's no way she has of leaving an abuser. Think about it. She is under that abuser's control every bit as much as Ruby Dhalla's nannies were under the control of that family—without recourse. For most women, the alternative of going to an interval house or a shelter is not appealing. That's not where they want to go; that's not where they want to raise their families. They want to be able to have the kind of work that would afford them independent living. Quite frankly, when women earn 71 cents on every dollar that men earn, that's not a reality. Quite frankly, when there are no child care spaces and they can't afford them, that's not a reality either. So, again, this is the wider picture within which this bill sits. The wider picture really is one of exploitation of women. So this bill, again, is a tiny step in a large sea of exploitation that has to do with the role of women in our province.

When I was a teenager, I remember marching for 24-hour free universal daycare. Trust me, that was a long, long, long time ago. Guess what? We're no closer to that halcyon day now than we were then, and we're bounded by provinces that have made significant strides on this file. We have Quebec, where you can get child care for $7 a day. We have Manitoba, where you can get child care for $17 a day. And then, here we sit, where only one in 10 children even has access to a space, and that space is going to cost over $1,000 a month.

So within that general sea of exploitation of all women, might I say, here we have, in a sense, the most marginalized of the marginalized: nannies—live-in caregivers who come from other countries, who come without a great many supports, who arrive in isolation into homes that nobody knows about, on which there's no oversight, very little education, if any. What motivation is there for an employer in this instance to let the worker know her rights, to let her know she doesn't have to work past 40 hours, or to let her know about benefits, or to let her know that she doesn't have to scrub the floors or polish shoes, that she's there to look after the children? Where is the onus on the employer to do this? Again, if there's no licensing of employers, if we don't know where these employers are and who's hiring who, how do we even know that these live-in caregivers exist? I can't imagine a more vulnerable situation, quite frankly, than that.

We absolutely agree in the New Democratic Party that there should be no fees of any sort for any worker seeking a job, and certainly not the kind of heinous fees that have been charged to women who can least afford it: those women who come from developing countries—the tens of thousands of dollars that have been charged to these women. Certainly we don't condone that. But as I said earlier, quite frankly, there's nothing in this bill that prevents people in their own country, so-called immigration brokers in their own countries, from still implementing these fees. There's no way of collecting back from those countries.

I was gladdened to see a kind of test case in the papers, where a woman, a live-in caregiver, actually did recoup some money for fees paid. But again, she's one of the lucky ones and one of the courageous ones, because, boy, oh boy, does that take some courage to stand up against your employers, to stand up against the system: a justice system which often isn't very just for those with no means. That's what this woman had to do to recoup that investment.

So this is the bill that's before us. It's small. It's not very wide-reaching in its attempts to change the situation of exploitation of foreign live-in caregivers. It certainly isn't very far-reaching in dealing with women's situation in Ontario and the lack of equality thereof. It certainly isn't very far-reaching in terms of that. It certainly doesn't address the core problem, which is the problem of child care: the lack of child care in this province, and certainly the lack of affordable child care in this province. It doesn't affect that. All it does—and I should add that it doesn't even address the two nannies who worked for Ruby Dhalla, which we're hoping is in process somewhere, we're hoping is being redressed somewhere. I'm hoping—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I think they just got a phone number, and that's it.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My colleague to the right here, ideologically and geographically, says that perhaps all they got was a phone number. Well, I hope that's not so; I really do. I would love to hear from the Minister of Labour about that case. I hope they didn't just get a phone number. I hope they actually got redress. I hope they got some money, quite frankly, and redress in that situation.

So again, here we have a situation where this bill does little. All it does is say to a nanny that if they have paid—first of all, it makes fees to place them illegal and says that if you've paid them, you might be able to recoup them. That's all this bill does.

1640

It doesn't address the isolation of the live-in caregiver, all alone in a home with strangers, far from her own family, far from her own support systems, far from her own friends and probably quite ignorant, not through her own capacity but because nobody has told her of the laws that affect her—of even this law that affects her—because, again, we don't know she exists. We don't know she exists because there's no licensing of employers here.

By the way, I want to say that when we asked that question of those who briefed us on this bill, all they had to say was—and I quote on this; this is how dismissive it was—"Oh, Manitoba has, what, 10 or 20? And we have thousands," as if that was a justification. And I'm sure Manitoba has more than 10 or 20 or 100 or 200 live-in caregivers. They somehow manage to keep track of foreign-trained professionals in their jurisdiction. We don't.

I should add that it's not just about live-in caregivers. This is also foreign-trained professionals who work on farms, who work here briefly and then leave. Do we know where they are? Do we have any kind of tracking system as to their safety? No. Again, this bill doesn't purport to do that.

Then, today we have a closure motion. We have a motion brought forward by the government saying, "We will end debate on this bill." Quite frankly, I think that's sad. Even though I'm going to vote for the bill, I think that's sad. I think closure motions are inherently anti-democratic.

The reason we have time to debate in this House—and you would know this better than others, Mr. Speaker, expert that you are in parliamentary procedure—the reason we give time to our members in this House to debate bills is so that we can hear the breadth of opinion, because whoever sits in government doesn't hold all the answers to all the issues; they never can. The whole point of having an opposition, the whole point of having clause-by-clause and adequate debate, of having the

institution of Parliament, in and of itself, is to make bills better, to bring forth laws that have been thought about, analyzed and subjected to the scrutiny of many different political opinions so that the laws are the strongest and most protective they can be. That's what we're doing here.

This government has tried to shortchange that process and said to Ontarians—not to us, because we are simply representatives of the people of Ontario—"Time's up. Enough. We don't want to hear any more. We've heard enough. We know all the answers. We've got it down. We want to move forward."

I'm not going to fight them on this bill. I'm going to vote for it because it's better than nothing. But I'm awfully tired of the better-than-nothing bills.

Because it's a closure motion, I at least have the freedom to talk about those bills that are particularly egregious, that we absolutely disagree with on this side of the House, and that are subjected to closure motions. Again, they want to not only cut off debate in this House—and here, of course, I'm talking about the dreaded harmonized sales tax that at least 76% of Ontarians don't want, that at least tens of thousands of Ontarians who have written to us don't want. At least in terms of that bill, there's a real reticence, and for good political reason. I can't fault the government on that. They want to ram that bill through and forget about it until it rears its ugly little head in July 2010, when people will actually have to go out and pay it. They want to get it out of here as fast as possible, because they know it's unpopular.

With all the bluster to the contrary, with all the trying to tell Ontarians what they should have and shouldn't have and what's good for them, they aren't listening to Ontarians about what Ontarians think they should have. If there's nothing else that we do in this place—hopefully it's to listen to our constituents and reflect what they want here. That is also our job as representatives of the parliamentary tradition.

I think the government has made the fatal political mistake of deciding they know best what is best for Ontarians, and they're going to tell them, educate them, inform them—these are all terms they use—and then ram the bill through. Because if it hangs around a little too much—it's sort of like food, right? The longer the HST bill sits around, the riper the smell and the worse the reaction. So they want this bill to be quickly dispensed with, and hopefully forgotten—hopefully—when people walk into the stores, fill up their gas tanks, pay their utility bills or, Lord forbid, have a funeral they have to pay for or a professional they have to pay a fee too. And all of a sudden, next July, when they find they're paying 8% more on everything, then I'm sure there will be a public relations campaign the size of which we can only dream of in the opposition benches to make that hard-to-swallow pill go down a little easier. Because if nothing else, it's about the spin.

So I understand the political motivation of ramming this through. What I don't understand is how that can be considered, in any way, transparent and democratic. That's what I don't understand.

What I don't understand, and I spoke about this earlier in private members' public business, is the reticence of the Liberal backbenchers. I said earlier that the backbenchers should get backbones and stand up, in contradistinction to the corner office and to their Premier and to the cabinet, and defend those they've been called to defend here: their constituents. If 76% of my constituents feel a certain way about a subject, whether I agree with them or not, I feel I'm duty-bound to at least represent that voice here. But I don't hear that voice on the other side of the House. I don't hear the voice that is in adamant opposition to the HST, that says, "I don't want to pay 8% more on most of the things I invest in." I don't hear that voice. We hear that voice, and we bring that voice forward. But where is it? Where are the concomitant e-mails to Liberal MPPs that we receive in our offices?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I don't think they bring them in—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I ask the member from Oxford. I know that we get hundreds of them in my office; we get hundreds of e-mails against the HST. We get phone calls. We have consultations. Knock on the doors, go out canvassing in your ridings and ask your constituents what they think of the HST. I can tell you what 76% of them will say: "We don't want it. It's a bad tax, a regressive tax at the wrong time." That's what they'll tell you. The polls aren't lying to you. That's what they will tell you.

So where is that voice? Where is the representation of that opinion across the floor? I don't hear it. I've been listening, I've been straining to hear, but I don't hear it.

I can tell you that Dalton McGuinty and the cabinet are not going to vote for you in the next election, backbench Liberal friends. They're not going to be casting their votes. No, the people in your ridings will be casting their votes, the people whom you didn't listen to, who are trying to tell you something that you don't want to hear—and I know you don't want to hear it.

That's why we in the opposition are calling for public inquiries. If you're going to bring in a tax that most people don't want, and you really feel that there's an educational job to be done, you really feel it's the best thing for Ontario, you really are proud of it, then why don't you go on the road and tell them? Allow them to tell you and give yourself a chance to tell them. Why not? What's the reticence? I don't get it.

I really have to say that I love some of the verbiage about the HST coming from the other side of the floor. What we're hearing now, of course, is that this is going to create 600,000 jobs, which is, quite frankly, laughable. Come on. This is a province that has lost 300,000 jobs. We're not seeing that. I mean, 600,000 jobs—we should do the breakdown, member from Oxford, after the HST is brought into play, of how many jobs per month 600,000 jobs breaks down to. It would be fun to have a running thermometer of how accurate that prediction is. Suffice to say, that dog don't hunt. That dog don't even sniff.

That's not going to fly—and metaphors ongoing. It's not going to create 600,000 jobs. Nobody buys it.

But the other line, that they are actually going to save on taxes, that the vast majority—what is it, 93%, we hear from the other side?—is going to save on taxes: This is just unbelievably strange. If the vast majority is going to save on taxes and everybody's going to get money back from the government, then why impose the tax in the first place? I thought taxes were about raising money. I thought they were about getting more money into government. So something doesn't compute. You don't have to be a CPA or a CGA to know that this doesn't add up. This doesn't add up. Something doesn't wash. A tax is a tax is a tax. It charges people money for something they wouldn't otherwise pay. That's what it does, and that's why you want to put it into place. We get that in opposition. We understand that. We just disagree with the kind of tax it is. It's a regressive flat tax that will hurt people in the lower incomes most. That's the reality.

For every dollar you're collecting on HST, $1.18 is going to a corporation. And guess what? I was speaking to small business representatives the other day. It's not going to go to them. Small businesses are horrified by the HST. All 30,000 of them in the GTA are horrified by the HST. Why? Because they know it's going to cost their consumers and they are going to lose business to the big box stores. They know that, the retailers and small business people in our community. They know that. They're very, very clear about it. They're very clear to us about it. They're absolutely upfront about it. There is no problem with them adding two and two and getting that a tax is a tax, that's it's to raise money for the government; it's not to give money back. They get that. They also get that it's going to hurt them.

You know the line about it saving them red tape? One of my small retailers said, "Well, you know, I spend about 15 minutes filling out these forms every two months." He said, "You know what? I'll take another 15 minutes if it saves me an 8% tax." They said, "Not only will it not help my business, which is already hurting because of the recession, but guess what? I'm also a consumer. I also buy gas and pay utilities. So it's going to hurt me at home. It's going hurt my customers at home, and they're going to spend less money with me." That's the simple reality for small business, the provider of 90% of the jobs in Ontario. So if 600,000 jobs are going to kind of magically appear, they ain't going to appear from small business, I'll tell you that much.

Quite frankly, the profit that you are taxing less of and that could go to pay for social service programs, the corporate tax gifts that you're giving to corporations, are only good for those corporations that are making a lot of money. It's not going to help corporations or small businesses that are suffering, that are barely getting by. It's not going to help them, because they're not making a profit. So you could give them a 100% drop in their corporate taxes because it wouldn't affect them at all. They're not making any profit. Any smart business person knows that you have to be making a fair whack of money before those corporate taxes have an effect on you. So who's making the fair whack of money through the recession in this province, I ask you? Very simple answers: Most of them are insurance companies and banks. Insurance companies and banks are making money. Insurance companies are suffering now, so it may be just banks. We'll stick with banks—banks and large global, mainly American, corporations, where that tax gift that you've given to them will not stay here in the province of Ontario, but will end up in the US treasury. It will actually be siphoned out of this country and go to the US.

So in what dreamland does this tax help anybody but the corporations that clearly have lobbied for it and are receiving it? I say no one. Certainly not small business. Certainly not seniors. They've spoken to me and to us in droves. Certainly not most middle-income people. And certainly not most poor people, marginalized people. It's not going to help them either.

In every measurable way, what we have in this province is bad economic news. It's bad economic news for those in the middle class; it's bad economic news for most business; it's bad economic news for those who are impoverished.

Is there anybody who's got some good news to share here? Well, perhaps, and it's only a perhaps, and that's the large corporations, presumably, maybe. I mean, manufacturing's been decimated in this province. We now have, what, a $25-billion debt? The member from Oxford nods his head knowingly. We're a have-not province. One in six children lives in poverty. We have 130,000 households waiting on the affordable housing list, waiting 10 to 20 years. We're no closer to decent daycare. We're certainly no closer to reasonably funded post-secondary education; we're 10th out of 10 per capita on spending there for students, and tuition fees keep going up.

I'm looking for good news here, member from Oxford. I'm desperately looking for good news. But if you believe the spin that comes out of this government, if you actually believe the press releases, if you believe what they tell the press and what the press sometimes tells the public, then hey, we live in utopia; Ontario is utopia, it really is. I can already hear the retort to this: "Oh, we're in a global recession. We're all being affected. It's bad news for everybody."

But strangely enough, it's not as bad news for everybody. Strangely enough, in other provinces the news is not as bad. Why is that? Why is it that Ontario is in particularly dire straits where other provinces seem to be doing—they're all being hit, no doubt, by the recession, but they seem to be doing okay. I know Manitoba isn't running a deficit; they're clawing, they're hanging on by their fingertips, but they're not running a deficit. That's a $25-billion advantage right there. I know Manitoba has $17-a-day daycare, too. How do you do that? Because, according to this government, it's one thing or the other, and in fact it's neither for this government. We don't

have daycare and we have a deficit. Certainly the experience of small business in other places is marginally better than it is here. So the question remains, what are they doing right that we're not doing? Or, unfortunately, what are we doing wrong? What is the McGuinty government doing wrong that they're not doing? These are questions that really demand some answers.

They're getting the answers, not from the government across the floor, but they're getting the answers from the people of Ontario. People are speaking very loudly and very clearly. They're speaking to us in e-mails, they're speaking to us in phone calls, they're speaking to us in letters, they're speaking to us at the door, and they're speaking to us in the forums that we're holding in our communities. I had one on the HST and condos. Let me tell you, condo owners are very unhappy about the HST—very unhappy. It's going to add 8%—well, between 6% and 8%, depending on their situation—to their costs every year. They're extremely unhappy in the province of Ontario.

I can tell you that realtors in my neighbourhood are extremely unhappy about the HST. They come to forums that we hold. They speak to us directly. They tell us what they're thinking. I can tell you that seniors in my riding—and this government says, "Oh, well, they just don't understand." I find that so patronizing: "Oh, the seniors just don't understand. If you explain it to them properly"—and our retort to that is: Please do. Please have public inquiries where you explain to seniors and other groups that are going to be hit by the HST exactly what the method is in this supposed madness—according to them—and listen to what they say in return. And I think they'll find that, in fact, seniors are very knowledgeable and that seniors actually do understand the tax system and how it's going to affect them. They have read it. They are educated, and they are responding, "We don't like it," from an educated, informed standpoint, and that's true of the other 76% of Ontarians. That's true of them as well.

So just listen. That's all we ask. That's all one can ask at the end of the day from our elected representatives, that they listen to the people that they are elected to represent and that these people bring their voice forward into this assembly. Whether they agree or not with the voice, at least the voice is heard. That's all we ask from members in Liberal ridings. We also ask that they simply stand up for their own best interests, quite frankly, and that instead of doing what the Premier wants them to do all the time, they actually do what their constituents want them to do, because that's what's going to get them re-elected. He doesn't cast a vote in their riding. The cabinet is not going to vote in their riding; the constituents are going to vote in their riding. We think it's in their best interests that they listen to those constituents and that they bring that voice forward, whether they agree or not.

1700

That's why we call for public inquiries, that's why we call for transparency, and, quite frankly, that's why we call for democracy in this place, which flies in the face of time allocation motions. Time allocation motions, closure motions, by their very nature, limit the debate, limit the opportunity for us, on this side of the House, to bring forward our constituents' voices, which is what we've been trying to do, and using every tool and trick at our disposal just to bring those voices forward. That's all were doing: what we're elected to do. It's a very simple thing, really.

In the two minutes I've got left, to get back to the nanny bill: Yes, I'm going to vote for it. Do I think closure on it was a bad move? Yes, I do. I think that it does a disservice to the very people that this bill purports to serve, and that's live-in caregivers. I think they would have liked to have had more of a voice on this bill and more time on this bill.

What is the rush? Well, I know the rush: The rush is that all of this needs to get out before the House rises; and particularly, the HST bill has to become a memory only, hopefully never to be ever thought of again—until, of course, it's paid in July. But unfortunately, this was badly planned. They should have done it the way BC did. It's still getting a terrible reaction, but at least there they did what Liberal governments are good at doing: sneaking in something that they didn't run on, but right after they were elected. That's what happened in BC. Here, to give them some credit, they're doing in it advance of getting elected, but trying to muffle descent and trying desperately not to hear the voices of their own constituents. It's good for us in opposition, so the polls say, but not particularly good representation. Unfortunately, my friends, it's the truth.

So, finally, is closure bad? Absolutely. The nanny bill? It's okay, but it could have been so much stronger. It could have protected the most vulnerable workers in our province so much better. Women's rights, exploited women—it didn't even touch that one. Women still can't get daycare, still earn 71 cents on the dollar to everything men earn, and still can't get housing etc.

So, again, it's an inch where we needed, in this case, 3,000 miles, but an inch I'll vote for. I just wish I didn't have to vote for it any time soon. I wish we had those nannies voices on the record just a little bit more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Further debate? There being none, we'll deal with the motion. This is the time allocation motion on Bill 210.

On November 19, Mr. Duguid moved government notice of motion number 144. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1703 to 1713.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margarett	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Zimmer, David
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	
Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri	Klees, Frank	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	
Hardeman, Ernie	Prue, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 34; the nays are 7.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy; and

That the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to meet on Thursday, December 3, 2009, during its regular meeting times for the purpose of public hearings on the bill and following routine proceedings on Monday, December 7, 2009, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Friday, December 4, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Monday, December 7, 2009, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, December 8, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of the second reading or third reading votes allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 163. Mr. Milloy.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure to speak this evening to, obviously, a very lengthy motion that we've just put forward which, at its core, is about Bill 175 and moving Bill 175 through the legislative process.

Those here in the House and those watching at home will be aware that we just completed a vote on a similar motion related to another bill. Perhaps they heard comments from my colleague over on the NDP side about the number of bills which are before the Legislature right now which the government is taking measures, through motions like the one I just read, to move forward.

If I can quote the honourable member, she said, "What's the rush? Why do we need to rush it through?" I thought I'd begin my remarks today by trying to explain why it is that we're rushing through a series of bills, including Bill 175.

The simple reason is that they're part of a package. They're part of a package that deals with the economy.

1720

I don't think there's anyone in this Legislature or anyone watching at home who would disagree that, right now, the Ontario economy has to be the number one preoccupation of every government. We have to work together—all of us in this Legislature—to ensure that Ontario can not only weather the current economic storm but can emerge stronger than ever.

That means taking measures like those in Bill 175, which deals with the issue of labour mobility, which is so important in terms of the issue of employment, which is such an extremely important issue right now as we deal with the current economic downturn. How do we make sure that those individuals who have the skills, who have the wherewithal, are able to receive employment?

As I said at the outset, this is part of a package of bills. Much was made in the earlier debate about another bill before this Legislature that we are trying to move forward as quickly as possible, and that's the bill that deals with the harmonized sales tax. The reason we are trying to push that bill through is, again, because of the economy, for economic reasons.

We want to see this bill go through so that we can put in place, as part of a package that is coming forward, comprehensive reform of our tax system. Part of that reform, if this bill passes, will be tax cuts that will come into place on January 1—tax cuts for 93% of taxpayers. They will be paying less personal income tax as a result of that bill. Ninety thousand low-income Ontarians will no longer pay any provincial personal income tax if the HST bill goes through. Again, that is why we're in a rush, because we want to see that measure adopted by the Legislature and we want to see Ontarians benefit from it as they deal with the current economic situation.

Our tax reform package, part of this larger package of economic measures, would cut the lowest tax bracket from 6.05% to 5.05% on the first $37,000 of income, making this the lowest income tax bracket among the provinces and certainly placing Ontario in a very, very competitive position. We're almost doubling current property and sales tax credits as part of this package that we want to put through. This means more money in the pockets of our low- and middle-income Ontarians.

There's also harmonization itself, which has been the topic of so much discussion this afternoon. Harmonization is something that has actually been long called for by members on all sides of this House. They've realized that we have 130 countries around the world that have adopted a value-added tax. We have a series of provinces in this country that have adopted a value-added tax. It's a much more efficient way to collect taxes.

What it means for our business community is, first of all, a saving of about $500 million when we talk about the fact that they will no longer have to have two sets of books, an inefficiency at best and a real cost measure for others. At the same time, it will have an effect on how they do business. As I think members realize, and certainly will know through the course of debates on various economic issues, when you pay PST on an item, it's not the first time the provincial sales tax is being paid. On many items we find at stores, or on other items we purchase, the sales tax has accumulated along the way; it's almost like compound interest as it comes forward. So what we're talking about is a tax reform package that will cut taxes and bring forward efficiencies. That's part of the economic package.

Do we have to do more? Of course. One of the areas we need to deal with is the issue of efficiency when it comes to occupations, when it comes, as I mentioned earlier, to the whole area of employment. That's where Bill 175 comes through—another important piece of legislation that we're going to have to work as a Legislature to try to make sure we can, yes, push it through the system, have the debate that's necessary and hopefully see it come forward as law.

Now, what is Bill 175 about? At its core, it's about the fact that the country of Canada is not a free market. One of the strangest notions of our Dominion is that we're a confederation of a number of provinces that have come together, and that although Canadians enjoy great mobility rights as they move and travel across the province, those rights are not absolute. You can find that on the trade front and you can certainly find that in terms of the labour mobility front.

Have there been efforts to try to address that? Certainly, there have been. I give credit to the various governments that have tried to tackle this. I think back to 1994, when the Chrétien government in Ottawa sat down with all the provinces and territories and signed the AIT, the Agreement on Internal Trade. That was signed by all the provinces and territories of the day and the federal government in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the Canadian economy, and they wanted to do that by reducing barriers to the movement of persons, goods, services and investments within Canada. If you think about it, the key that we're talking about is "persons," the whole idea of labour mobility. Within the Agreement on Internal Trade, chapter 7 addresses this issue of labour mobility.

Some may be saying, "Well, wait a minute. You can work anywhere you want within Canada." In many cases it's true, depending on the nature of the work you want to do. But one area where it's not true is what's often referred to as the "regulated professions," of which we have about 300 here in the province of Ontario. To just give individuals an idea of what we mean by "regulated professions," obviously these are professions where you not only have to undertake a certain amount of training, but you also usually have to write an exam or undergo some sort of on-the-job certification. This would include a whole variety of occupations that people would be very familiar with here: architects, engineers, veterinarians, audiologists, doctors, lawyers. I think everyone knows that we have these regulated professions, but what they may not be aware of is that here in the country of Canada it is not always automatic that you can move from one province to another and hang out your shingle, so to speak. In other words, an architect from Saskatchewan does not have the protection to move to the province of Ontario and automatically practise. For different professions, there are different standards regarding the ease with which they can move across barriers. Some are better than others. With many, if you move from one province to another, you'll be asked to complete further education; you may have to go through extensive paperwork; you may have to undergo experience within the jurisdiction that you're moving to. These create barriers for individuals. As long ago as 1994—a bit of a history lesson—this was recognized as a hindrance to the economy of Canada. It makes absolutely no sense that someone who's a professional trained in one province can't simply move to another province, that we don't have that freedom of movement.

I referenced chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade, which was signed in 1994. The purpose of chapter

7 was to enable any worker certified for an occupation by a regulatory authority in one province or territory to be recognized as qualified for that occupation in all other provinces and territories.

Similarly, chapter 17 of the Agreement on Internal Trade sets out procedures for the resolution of government-to-government and person-to-government disputes within the scope of the Agreement on Internal Trade, including those related to labour mobility. If you go back to 1994, when this initial agreement was put into place—you have to fast-forward 15 years later, and unfortunately not a lot of progress had been made in terms of implementing this very, very important part of the Agreement on Internal Trade.

Why is it important? Well, other than the simple logic of it, the simple fact that all of us recognize that Canada is one country—we are obviously a partnership amongst different jurisdictions, and I think all of us recognize as we move around the country that we have a pretty good standard here. If I—and I mentioned this in the debate on the bill—move to Saskatchewan and purchase a house in Saskatchewan, I'm not going to have any sleepless nights saying, "Perhaps that architect was educated here in Saskatchewan and for some reason it's going to be a different standard than Ontario." At its core we're talking about Canadian standards, and I think all of us recognize that there's a certain lack of fairness in the fact that we can't spread those standards across the country.

1730

But there's also a mobility issue here in terms of some of the economic challenges that are facing our nation right now. We are in a time of high unemployment, and I think all of us recognize that we have to provide as much support as possible to individuals who have skills, that they should be able to pursue those opportunities within the country of Canada. But at the same time, although we have high unemployment—and it's a very serious matter, one that our government is taking a number of measures to address; I'm very proud of much of the activity that we've undertaken—at the same time, we also have skill shortages. People in this Legislature may be surprised to hear that there are areas where, for demographic reasons, for just the lack of trained individuals, we don't have the all the workers we need.

So there's an economic argument that says: Let's open up our borders. Let's allow individuals from other jurisdictions, other provinces and territories, to come to Ontario where skills are wanting. Let's make sure that everyone in Canada who has the training that's needed can move through and find that career or that profession and not have these obstacles.

I'll share this with the House. A survey of Canadian businesses by the Conference Board of Canada, in 2005, identified the lack of labour mobility as one of the top three barriers to competition across the country. At the outset, I spoke about this package of reforms, this package of legislation the government is bringing in, and I said that it's not only to address the immediate-term problems, but it's also to talk about Ontario in the future, and that brings up the whole issue of demographics.

Although we are in time of high unemployment, and although that is of great concern to this government and we're bringing forward training programs—I had a chance in question period today to share some statistics on Second Career, which has been a very great success for this government, and it's only one of a whole menu of services that are available to people looking for jobs. Although we have to continue to focus on issues around unemployment and we have to continue to focus on issues around training, we also have to have a longer-term look.

What the experts tell us about the longer term is that there's a demographic shift, and we're witnessing that demographic shift right now. In 2011, we're going to be seeing the baby boomers start to retire. I think all of us have seen those various statistics floating around, that it was 30 or 40 years ago that you had eight working people for every senior. I forget and I don't know them off the top of my head, but I think now it's almost reversed so that for every seven or eight seniors, you have one working person.

We are seeing a real demographic shift here, where we have an older and older population and we have a younger population which is having to carry more of the burden. And because we're starting to see that younger population shrink because, over time, the experts are telling us there won't be as many new young individuals entering the workforce, we have to make sure that we have issues like labour mobility addressed. We've got to be able to address it head-on, because for Ontario to continue to prosper, for Ontario to continue its role as the engine of the economy here in Canada, we've got to make sure that they have a steady stream of labour supply.

There's important work going on—my colleague the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration—in terms of welcoming new Canadians here, but at the same time we've got to be able to look at home as well. We've got to make sure that if there are individuals from Manitoba, Saskatchewan or British Columbia who want to come to Ontario to practise their trade, they'll be able to. That's why Bill 175 is so important, both for the short term and for the long term moving forward.

I was telling the story about 1994 when the federal government and the provinces and territories came together, and the history of the next 15 years is the history of some efforts to address some of these issues, to try to implement the intent of the agreement on internal trade. I remember that my former colleague Mr. Cordiano, as Minister of Economic Development and Trade, was attending meetings with the federal government on this issue. I spent time, as members may know, as parliamentary assistant in intergovernmental affairs. We were trying to revive this with the fellow provinces.

But the real turning point came very recently, last year, in 2008, during the Council of the Federation, which is the meeting of all the provincial and territorial Premiers, when they met and said, "Enough is enough. It's time to make the Agreement on Internal Trade, and particularly labour mobility, a priority for this country."

What happened then was a series of meetings, a series of discussions. I was involved with them as Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, as I have specific responsibility on labour mobility. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade at the time, Mr. Bryant, was also involved. There were discussions back and forth, and in January of 2009, agreement was reached between the provinces that we were going to move forward.

What we are discussing today, Bill 175, is in fact the fruits of these discussions. It is Ontario living up to this commitment that was signed in January 2009, saying that we want to move forward with labour mobility and we want to make sure that it's a reality across this country.

Right now in other jurisdictions there are similar debates going on, as other provincial governments are bringing forward similar pieces of legislation which are going to be opening up the borders between us, allowing for full labour mobility.

Let me talk just a little bit about the principles of the bill. What it means is that someone who is trained—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I remind the honourable minister that we are debating the time allocation motion on the bill, so it's quite appropriate to discuss the bill, but maybe you'd like to refer to the time allocation motion once in a while too. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think that's very wise counsel. The issue that's before us was raised by my colleague in a similar debate that we just had. She raised the question: Why are we rushing these things through? I think I've tried to address the reason why we are rushing these things through. There is a package of them, I admit. There are a number of bills before the Legislature right now that on which the government is taking action through motions similar to the one that I brought forward today.

The reason we feel there is an urgency is because there is an economic situation that is facing our province right now. We have an economic downturn and we need to make sure that the legislation that's before us moves forward in order to provide the short-term economic relief or the short-term economic tools which are going to help this province.

I talked about the tax cuts that we want to see go in place January 1—very urgent. We're talking about the whole issue of jobs and training. Bill 175, with labour mobility, is all part of that package. It's about giving individuals the wherewithal—that first of all we can attract to this province the skilled trades we need, and also that we're moving away from and eliminating the obstacles that exist out there for people from other provinces.

Just to explain how this bill—which we're debating right now whether we should move forward—would work, what the principle is behind the bill: It's sort of a default system. What that means is that if you are recognized in one province as holding a certain regulated occupation, let's say as an architect, then you can automatically be recognized in another province. You don't have to fill out any paperwork; you don't have to be subjected to residency requirements; you don't have to go through a reassessment process. It means that an architect is an architect, a veterinarian is a veterinarian, an engineer is an engineer and an audiologist is an audiologist.

After—how many years?—14 years of debate, going back to the AIT, when we look at the current economic situation, when we are constantly told that we need to make sure we have a competitive workforce, that we have the best-skilled people, I think every member of this Legislature can understand that there is urgency to moving this through, and that's why we're bringing forward this motion.

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As I say, it's part of a package. I freely admit to this Legislature that we are trying to rush through a number of measures. We are trying to rush through the HST. We just finished debating a bill that had to do with protection for workers, something very, very important in any economic climate, but particularly in this day and age when people are struggling to hold on to jobs. We want to make sure they have the protection that's needed.

So, as I said, it's a negative-option situation, I guess—

Interjection.

Hon. John Milloy: —and I'll get to that in a second—in the sense that everyone is recognized. If you're recognized in one jurisdiction, you're recognized in the other.

I threw out the term "negative option," from, I guess, this old term "negative option billing," because there are provisions that would allow a province or territory to come forward and say, "Look, we support the idea of full mobility," which Bill 175 does, "but we want to identify a number of regulated occupations where we believe that there's a real difference between what's going on in another jurisdiction and what's going on in ours." So unless they come forward with these exceptions—and I want to spend a minute or two on them a little bit later in my remarks today—then it's accepted that that architect from Saskatchewan is free to practise here in the province of Ontario. Unless a province or jurisdiction comes forward with the exceptions, it will be free labour mobility across this province. It's about time. It's actually, in some ways, almost embarrassing that we live in a nation which prides itself in terms of its national unity, which prides itself on its place in world, and yet within it we have these barriers which are far outmoded, especially in the 21st century. That's why we have put forward this motion to move it forward.

One of the interesting angles to what I've just described in terms of that free mobility for so many of these regulated occupations is the issue of new Canadians. I know that when this bill came up for debate, I believe it was a week or two ago, a lot of reference was made by members on all sides of the House about new Canadians. I'm going to acknowledge that every member of this House, every party that's here in this Legislature, has a concern about how we, as a society, welcome new Canadians here to our province and, very specifically, how we welcome them into the matching professions that

they were trained for at home. I know every party has made this a priority moving forward, and I certainly want to commend every member, because this is a top-of-mind issue. We live in a province where, notwithstanding some of the unemployment issues that we've talked about a bit today, we do have shortages of skilled professionals. All of us have read accounts in the media of various medical doctors, engineers and other professionals who are working in menial jobs because they are new Canadians and they are finding obstacles to being recognized.

We've come a long way. A lot of work was done in the last term in office. We have Madame Jean Augustine, who leads an initiative which works with the various regulatory bodies to make sure they are removing obstacles for foreign-trained professionals and that they are able to come to this country and, through the support, often, of bridge training, of further acclimatization to maybe some of the cultural issues around their profession—if it's one that deals with members of the public, perhaps there's language training—we work to prepare them as quickly as possible to enter their profession.

Ontario is not alone. I'm a member of the forum of labour market ministers, and if you talk to fellow ministers in other provinces, they will talk about their efforts to welcome new Canadians into the country. The problem? They're welcomed into an individual province, although many of the obstacles are being moved. They work hard; they work on retraining, perhaps, or upgrading or bridge training. They work on language skills. They finally are accepted as a regulated professional in the province of Ontario, and then they want to move elsewhere in country. What happens? They run flat into reassessment, into retraining, into all sorts of barriers and obstacles that exist.

I think it's very important—and again, there is urgency in moving this through not just for Ontario residents right now but for future Ontario residents who come from outside this country. When those new Canadians come to any province, or in this case, obviously Ontario, and undertake that hard work—I salute their courage. I've met with many who are trying to align their skills with what's needed here in the province of Ontario. I also commend the work that's done by the various regulatory agencies to try to welcome these individuals as quickly as possible.

But what we have to make sure happens as quickly as possible is that the certification they receive in Ontario—and I'm going to use the term—is not somehow inadvertently deemed second-class. Yes, the newcomer to the province of Ontario was trained outside the country. "We're willing to recognize your particular skill here in Ontario, but for heaven's sake don't leave the province, because if you leave the province, it's not going to be accepted."

It's the same way the other way around, that somehow we're not going to accept new Canadians from other jurisdictions because they were trained outside the country. I think it's time that we as a country recognize how important it is that we welcome new Canadians here and that we allow them to practise the profession they were trained for, and that if they are recognized in one jurisdiction, they move forward.

I pointed out earlier in my remarks the basic principles behind Bill 175, and I think I've outlined a number of reasons why the government is very anxious to see it through. But I did point out that—and I use the old advertising term, negative-option billing—the way it would work would be that it's automatic. Labour mobility is automatic unless a jurisdiction, a province or territory, puts forward an exception.

I wanted to spend a minute on exceptions because obviously we're asking members here to rush through a bill, and some of them may say, "Wait a minute. I understand the principle. I understand that that architect in Saskatchewan should have the right to come here to the province of Ontario and practise, but there are 300 professions." They may say to themselves, "You know what? We're a big country and there are differences that exist." I think we all recognize that across the country. Are there safeguards there so that if we look across at another jurisdiction, another province or territory, and see a specific occupation, a regulated authority or regulated profession that we feel is not appropriate to just automatically welcome to Ontario—and of course vice versa; if another jurisdiction looks to Ontario's training standard, its experiences—do we need to have that mechanism in there where a province can—and I'm using the term that's used in the Agreement on Internal Trade—put forward an exception?

I think it's very important that members know, before they vote to push this bill forward, that that provision does exist in Bill 175. It gives the government of Ontario—and the other bills that are being debated, as I said, many of them before Legislatures across this country—and it gives other Legislatures the right to cite an exception.

What is the basis of these exceptions? Just to be clear, it says that we will not automatically allow someone with particular training, with a particular occupation or regulated skill in a particular jurisdiction, to move to Ontario and automatically practise their trade.

What would be the reasons for these exceptions? I'd like to outline them here. I'll give you the actual wording from the act. "The labour mobility chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade allows each province or territory to approve exceptions and maintain additional certification requirements"—so that doesn't mean that we're saying they're not welcome here in the province; it means they will have to receive additional training or perhaps undergo an additional assessment—for workers in specific occupations based on public security and safety; public order; protection of human, animal or plant life or health; protection of the environment; consumer protection, protection of the health, safety and well-being of workers; provision of adequate social and health services to all its geographic regions; and programs for disadvantaged groups.

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This is the bundle of rationales that can be put forward by a province to suggest that someone from another

jurisdiction cannot automatically come and practise here in the province of Ontario.

The exceptions and the process for dealing with them have been the topic of much discussion between the various provinces and territories. I'll talk a little bit about the way it has worked in Ontario, because the question before the Legislature right now is: Should we be proceeding with this bill at a rapid pace? Should we be moving it forward to committee and debate? I think members need to know that there has been a safeguard, that the government has done its homework before deciding whether to move it forward. So I'll talk about the process that we undertook here in the province of Ontario.

What we did is we talked to all the bodies that are responsible for the different regulated authorities. The Ontario College of Teachers comes to mind; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; the College of Nurses of Ontario. I think members get the point. There are all these bodies which are responsible for regulating different authorities. We talked to them about standards and practices in other provinces and jurisdictions, and we talked about the standards here in the province of Ontario. While we were doing that, every other province and territory was doing that with their various organizations.

What was very heartening, I think, is that a dialogue began, a dialogue between the government and the organizations and a dialogue between provinces. We started to talk about what it means to be a nurse in Canada, what it means to be an architect in Canada. We started to take a look.

There are differences. I'm not going to stand here today and say that training for architecture, which is the one I used a second ago, is the same everywhere. But are those differences sufficient to say that a Saskatchewan architect should not be able to practise in the province of Ontario? The answer was no. It was no for the vast majority of trades and professions that we're talking about, not only in Ontario—and I think this is a very important part—but across this country.

As this dialogue continued, we started to take a look at all these regulated occupations and all these trades, and we started to, in a sense, check the list off. Could we all agree on architects? Yes, we could. Could we agree on engineers, veterinarians and audiologists? What happened is that every province winnowed it down, whittled the list down to a very small number.

I've got to say I'm very proud, in a sense, to be a Canadian. We have all these differences between us, and it is to the credit not just of the regulatory authorities here in Ontario but regulatory authorities across the country that they were able to bring that list down to a small list—in Ontario's case, six exceptions, six regulated trades, from specific provinces that we feel, for the reasons listed above, the reasons that I've just listed, cannot automatically come and practise here.

When I look at what other provinces brought forward, they brought forward similar numbers—some perhaps a little bit less, some perhaps a little bit more.

Ontario has taken the step now of formally publishing these exceptions on the website. I think it's very important for members to know—because they're going to be asked whether we need to move forward on this bill, and I'm arguing that the safeguards are there that might concern them—that these exceptions that we've published are not scheduled to be there forever. The fact is that they are a starting point. We want to work with other jurisdictions over the coming months and years and we want to eliminate that list—that is our goal—as do other provinces and territories.

I can give you a few examples of our six exceptions.

Dental hygienists: We feel that dental hygienists from Yukon and Nunavut who have not graduated from a nationally accredited program must, if they come to Ontario, complete the national or equivalent exam. That's an opportunity—I'm just choosing one example here—for the Ontario government, for those agencies that are responsible for dental hygienists both in Yukon and Nunavut as well as Ontario, to sit down and talk about the way the course is taught, the program that has come forward. What we are hopeful of is that we're going to get the type of agreement so that we can remove this exception and make sure that Ontario is open. That is the goal: full labour mobility.

The only exception to all this—I will put one on the record—is the issue of lawyers. I suspect, if this bill passes, that if we come back years from now, we will find that the difference in legal systems that exists between Quebec and the rest of the country will mean that we will also have a caveat that we will require lawyers from Quebec——and I imagine every other jurisdiction has put this down—to take additional training or examinations. I suspect the government of Quebec is going to do the same thing, because we do have a different legal system. But that's a very rare example.

I think the outcome of this process—and, my gosh, we've gone a long way in just a short period of time. What are we at now—about a year and a half? The outcome of this process is going to be, for all intents and purposes, with very few exceptions, full labour mobility across the nation.

I want to conclude. I know members would love if I went on forever, but I only have a little less than two minutes. I want to conclude where I started, and I want to answer the question that was put forward by the member: "What's the rush?" The rush is that we are in an economic downturn that needs to be addressed. I am very proud that we are a government that has, certainly in the past year, brought forward a variety of measures to deal with the immediate situation. We can talk about stimulus spending, we can talk about infrastructure and how Ontario can move through this current economic storm. But at the same time, we are a government that has an eye to the future, and we are saying that we have to make sure Ontario is positioned for the future.

Bill 175 is urgent because it's going to represent Ontario's part in making sure that we have labour mobility in this country, which is going to help competitiveness and it's going to help workers that are looking to move

across this nation. It's also going to help employers who are looking to bring in skilled workers.

I admit that this is a part of a package that we brought forward today, that we've brought forward these weeks in the Legislature. It includes things like the HST, which my honourable friend spent most of her speech—even though it was a labour bill—talking about, and she kept asking the question, "Why the rush?" I'm going to tell you: The immediate rush is because on January 1, we want to bring in a comprehensive set of tax cuts which are going to help the people of Ontario.

It's all about the economy these days. Bill 175, the budget bill that deals with the HST, the labour bill that was debated earlier today: These are all part—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The member's time has expired.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being just about 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Government
Publications

No. 194A

Nº 194A

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 30 November 2009

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 30 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 30 novembre 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce the independent driving instructors and owners of the DriveTest centres in Ontario, who are here today in the visitors' gallery to draw to the minister's attention the dispute between Serco and the Ministry of Transportation. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Today the Cement Association of Canada and the Canadian Ready Mixed Concrete Association and its members are visiting Queen's Park. I'd like to welcome our special guests to the Legislature and to acknowledge in the members' gallery the president and CEO of Holcim, which operates its main plant in Mississauga South. Welcome, Mr. Paul Ostrander.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to welcome Mark Anderson, president of the lakes and seaway business unit for Lafarge North America, who is here today as part of cement day. I want to thank him and the other cement industry representatives for coming to update us on their industry.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I am also delighted, because it's cement association day, to welcome Bram Vermeulen, the former CEO of St Marys Cement Group.

Today is the beginning of our first western wardens' day here at Queen's Park. We have many of our colleagues from counties in western Ontario here visiting today. I know members will want to introduce them. I'm joined by the member for Sarnia–Lambton hosting today, but I do want to make special mention of my good friend John Green, the mayor of Mapleton, who is here visiting today. I'll leave it to others to introduce their guests.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure today to introduce and welcome to the House Cheryl Hughes. Cheryl is the mother of page Olivia Hughes from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. Her grandmother, Betty Grant, is here as well to enjoy the proceedings in the House today.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Connor Niedbala from Etobicoke Centre is page captain today. His parents are here to join him: Michelle and Brent Niedbala, in the members' gallery. I'd like to say "welcome."

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I have a delegation here today representing a number of different organizations across Ontario: The Association of Architectural Technologists is joined today by Aubrey LeBlanc; Lang Michner has two of its taxation lawyers here, Cindy Todgham Cherniak and Hartley Lefton; the Ontario Retirement Communities Association has Gord White; Revera Health Services has Jandy Beresford, Derrick Hoare and Larry Querin; Premier Homecare Services has Martha Lawrence; Chartwell Seniors Housing has Sheri Annabel; and condo board representatives Brenda Elworthy, Christine Hillyer, Fred Kirsh, Grace Woo, Guido Smit, James Priest, Jim McKinney, Marie Cafarelli, PamelaAnn Campbell, Prudence Woo, Ric Hillyer and Steve Zheng. I also have members here from the Public Sector Retirees Coalition: Barry King, Don and Audrey McLeod, Doug Priest, Jim Garchinski, Jim Priest, Paul Bailey, Phil Slack, Rick Metcalfe and Vic Dybenko. The Council on Aging Network of Ontario is here with Christine McMillan, Robert Ridsdale and Galen McMonagle. The Ontario Monument Builders Association is here: Doug King and Robert Youngs. Toronto Sports Medicine is here with Andrea Prieur, and the Ontario Camps Association with Aruna Ogala.

They all oppose the HST, and that's why they're here today.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm delighted to welcome a resident of the great community of Ottawa, Michael McSweeney, vice-president of the Cement Association of Canada, but more importantly a former alderman of the city of Ottawa representing Canterbury ward. Welcome, Mr. McSweeney.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to introduce the mayor of the township of Centre Wellington and the warden of Wellington county, Mayor Joanne Ross-Zuj, as well as the mayor of the township of Mapleton, John Green. Welcome to both of you.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the House my parents, Mary and Charlie Aggelonitis, and a family friend, Filomena Doucet.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It gives me great pleasure today in the House to introduce the warden of Lambton county, Mr. Jim Burns, and, accompanying him, Ron Van Horne, the chief administrative officer for Lambton.

Mr. Dave Levac: With the western wardens crew comes to us the chair of the western wardens, the mayor of Brant and a former MPP of this House, Mayor Ron Eddy. I think he should be greeted here as well, along with his CEO, Don Glassford.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On behalf of page Vanessa Van Decker, I'd like to welcome her mother, Maureen Madigan, who is joining us for the proceedings today.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd very much like to welcome the students of Gateway Public School to Queen's Park today, from the wonderful riding of Don Valley West.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: It's a pleasure for me to welcome the warden of Grey county, and also the mayor of West Grey. He happens to be sitting beside Ron Eddy, which will probably be a detriment to him right now. Anyway, I'm glad you're here, Warden.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'd like to introduce two guests who are visiting the Legislature today: from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, David Harvey and Philip Caffery.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to introduce, in the members' west gallery, Tony Guergis, the warden of Simcoe county, and his delegation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome representatives of CI Financial who are here in the Legislature today protesting the HST.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I too would like to recognize, in the members' gallery, the warden of the great county of Oxford, Paul Holbrough.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Just to ensure that we don't miss any of our friends from the western wardens, I'm delighted also to extend greetings to Linda Dean and Gord Montgomery from Dufferin; Graham Warwick from Elgin; Kevin Eccles, Gary Wood, Bob Pringle from Grey; and Albert Bannister from Middlesex county.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): For anybody feeling left out who wasn't introduced, welcome to everyone else.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Deputy Premier. In 2007, you campaigned against tax increases. In fact, Premier McGuinty is quoted as saying, "We're not going to raise taxes." But just like you did in 2003, when you brought in the so-called health tax that attacked Ontario working families, you have now broken that promise in the 2007 election campaign with your massive, $3-billion greedy HST tax grab.

I ask the Deputy Premier, why do you say things during the election and then do the opposite once you're in office?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government is bringing forward the largest tax cut package in Ontario history. Individuals and businesses will, overall, see a reduction in the taxes we collect of almost $3.4 billion. That is why a range of groups, a range of industries, have supported this, everyone from the Daily Bread Food Bank, through to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. This tax cut package, which was properly pointed out by Roger Martin in his recent work, will in fact lower taxes overall for some 93% of Ontarians.

Once we get past the phony rhetoric and the hyperbole, we can look at the real experts. We can look at what his own expert witness, Jack Mintz, said, which is that this package will create 600,000 jobs. Sir, this is about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: So I guess working families are supposed to believe that the HST is actually going to lower their taxes. Well, Minister, why don't you take that out to public hearings across the province of Ontario? I think the minister would get laughed out of the room.

Not only did Dalton McGuinty promise, during the 2007 campaign, not to increase taxes and now is increasing them with the HST, he also said that he was committed to open, public hearings.

Minister, your own budget says that you're counting on the HST to add $3 billion in net revenue to your coffers. So, once again, you say one thing during the campaign and you do the opposite once in office.

I ask the minister: Do you lack credibility or are you simply not good to rely upon to keep your promises?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think the Leader of the Opposition ought to read the lines below that: the ones that show the corporate tax cuts, the ones that show the personal tax cuts, the ones that show the doubling of property tax credits for seniors.

This tax package will cut taxes overall for 93% of Ontarians. It will create some 600,000 net new jobs. This is the right policy for Ontario. It's about our future. It's about more jobs for our children and grandchildren. It's the right package for the times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: We remember Premier Dalton McGuinty, when he sat in this chair, said famously, "'Public hearings'; those two words go together nicely if you believe in true democracy." Now that he is Premier, after six years we see an entirely different story.

Minister, this is the largest sales tax grab in the history of our province, and all you want to do is hold a few hours of public hearings at Queen's Park.

Minister, you have six months before you start to scoop this money out of the pockets of Ontario families and retirees. Why don't you set aside your time allocation, don't ram this bill through, and have open, free, public, province-wide hearings in Brantford, in North Bay, in Cornwall, in Sarnia? Why won't you face the taxpayers who are going to foot the bill?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Oh, my goodness. This is rich, coming from that.

Let's look at the Conservative record—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Between 1999 and 2003, budget bills 14, 140, 152, 127, 45, 109, 198, 53: all budget bills, all time-allocated, none with public hearings. So I don't need that from that side of the House.

We have had more than 30 hours of debate in this House—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We want the tax cuts for individuals to take effect on January 1. We have had 33 hours of debate in this House.

In order to protest the lack of hearings, they walked away from an hour of question period.

We will have adequate public hearings. We've had 33 hours of debate. This issue is well understood. We're moving forward with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question again for the Deputy Premier: The finance minister should well know those bills he mentioned contained tax reductions for Ontario working families, tax reductions for middle-class families, tax reductions for Ontario businesses.

They are bringing forward and ramming through the House the biggest sales tax increase in the history of our province.

Minister, Ontario families know that your new HST will mean it'll cost more to put gas in their car, it'll cost them more to heat their home, it'll cost them more for natural gas for their appliances.

Minister, if this is such a good idea, can you name three products where we'll see prices actually come down under your HST tax grab?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Personal taxes will come down. Corporate taxes will come down. Seniors' property tax credits—we'll reduce their taxes. The Ontario child benefit—we'll lower taxes for low-income Ontario citizens.

The member can talk all he wants, and he can ignore all of the information that has been provided. This tax cut will benefit 93% of Ontarians with a reduction overall in their taxes, it will create 600,000 net new jobs, it will increase the amount of net new capital in the province, and it will raise disposable incomes.

We recognize that this is a complex piece of public policy. We will continue, as my colleague the Minister of Revenue and others have done, to help educate people to understand it. But overall, this tax cut package will create jobs, improve investment and improve disposable—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think I got an answer. Minister, we know that your HST sales tax grab will mean that the price of gas goes up, heat for homes, natural gas for appliances, everyday services we use like getting your hair cut, and taking your dog to your vet. They're even going to put a tax on the management fees of mutual funds, impacting on retirees in the province of Ontario.

I will ask the minister one more time: If it is such a good idea to increase the sales tax for Ontario families, can you name me three products where you'll see the prices actually come down when you put this tax grab into place?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes. Farmers will no longer pay sales tax on trucks, light vans and parts, furniture, lawn mowers, computers, office supplies, freezers and other equipment. I suppose the member and his party have a lot of things against farmers. Those prices will come down.

I'll point out to him that last year Mr. Hudak called Jack Mintz as his expert witness to the finance committee's hearings, and he asked him, "If there's one thing you could do, one thing at all, to improve the economy, what would it be?" Mr. Mintz said he would harmonize the sales tax. Mr. Mintz also points out that prices will come down for all consumers, as do the C.D. Howe Institute and the TD Bank. This is the right policy. It's about creating jobs in Ontario, it's about improving incomes, improving investments, and it's the right policy for those 600,000 new jobs. We're moving forward because we see a brighter future for Ontario because of this policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: So now we hear the minister tell Ontario families that as a result of his HST sales tax grab, by putting 8% across a whole new range of goods and services, prices are going to come down.

Minister, I don't think Ontario families are going to believe a word of your story, and for good reason. Despite promising no new tax increases, Dalton McGuinty has put personal income taxes up with his big health tax grab. Businesses' taxes under Dalton McGuinty are up; small business taxes are up; land transfer taxes in the city of Toronto are up; alcohol taxes under Dalton McGuinty are up; and jobs are down. They make all kinds of promises, but why in the world would Ontario families, who foot the bill, believe you for one second?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: If those people who are talking to you had listened to you earlier this year, they might believe it. Here's what you said: "To be clear, I believe that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate sets of taxes and policies and to collect two separate groups of sales taxes." That's to the Economic Club.

Here's what Mr. Sterling, the member for Carlton–Mississippi Mills, said—it's in Hansard: "The Ontario government should harmonize its provincial sales tax with the federal goods and services tax."

Here's what Peter Shurman, the member for Thornhill, said: "I am not saying that harmonization ultimately is a bad idea." That's what Mr. Flaherty said in his budget of 2008.

Here's what Bob Runciman, the member for Leeds–Grenville, said: "I think, in theory, our party is supportive of harmonization ... it's something we think should occur."

One party in this House has been consistent: the Ontario Liberal Party. One party has a plan for future—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier: This week in Ottawa, debate will rage about the Premier's unfair tax scheme. The Premier's party, the Liberal Party of Canada, isn't sure whether they're going to support what their leader has called "the Harper sales tax." But the Premier's scheme does have a champion: the Harper Conservatives, the same government that this Acting Premier, Ontario's finance minister, denounced as "an embarrassment" just last year.

How does the Acting Premier explain this particular turn of events?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We knew when we introduced this that it would require an amendment to the excise tax in Ottawa. Like all members of the House, my hope is that federal members will support it. This issue is important to Ontario's future. It will create some 600,000 new jobs. It will lower taxes overall for consumers.

I recognize it's a difficult choice for all members and I recognize the importance of full debate. This is the first time tax measures have been debated in both the federal House and the Ontario House, which is another indication of the amount of public hearings this has. I understand that the Harper government has brought forward a notice of ways and means to amend the Excise Tax Act. I understand that it will come to a vote this week and I look forward to its passage by the federal House.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, we can't really blame the federal Liberals in Ottawa for being confused, because not too long ago, the Conservative finance minister came here to Ontario demanding a new harmonized sales tax for everyday people and a massive across-the-board, no-strings-attached tax giveaway for the corporate sector. When he did, this government called him an embarrassment, and they rejected his ideas. My question to the Acting Premier is, who is the embarrassment today?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think the global downturn in the world economy—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —the federal government understands what we said—and if the member read beyond that quote, it would have said that in order to do what the federal government wanted us to do, we needed their help and support. They have brought forward $4.3 billion to do that. That's another reason why this is an extremely important tax package, not just for Ontario. That's why I think British Columbia has chosen to harmonize its tax. That's why the NDP government in Nova Scotia has chosen not to repeal their harmonized sales tax. So there are difficult choices for all of us. We've laid out a plan to create some 600,000 net new jobs and to raise incomes, disposable incomes. That's what's important about the future. I look forward to members of the federal House having their opportunity to cast a vote on this, this week.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Its no surprise that the Acting Premier's Ottawa cousins don't want to be associated with his unfair tax scheme. They may have made promises in backroom meetings, but in public, they're hearing the exact same voices that we're all hearing. That may be why one Liberal MP has declared that the Prime Minister should not be encouraging tax increases in the middle of a recession. Does the Acting Premier agree with his fellow Liberals, or will he defend Prime Minister Harper?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, I agree with Hugh Mackenzie, the NDP economist, who has advised. Let me just remind the member opposite of what Mr. Mackenzie says. He says, "Ontario's 2009-10 budget establishes the right direction for the next few years. It provides substantial economic stimulus. It is consistent with the new orthodoxy that relies heavily on governments to help rebuild damaged economies. It imposes some coherence on an incoherent federal plan. It increases support for low-income families and individuals. It modernizes Ontario's consumption tax."

I also agree with the NDP's Fair Tax Commission, which recommended the harmonization of Ontario's HST and GST. These times call for a substantive plan to help create jobs, to raise incomes and to raise the level of capital investment.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The only thing that's incoherent is the federal Liberals' position on the harmonized sales tax.

This a question to the Acting Premier as well. People across Ontario feel blindsided by a Premier who is hitting them with the exact tax scheme that they used to rail against.

New Democrats have a simple message to all MPs in Ottawa this week: Represent your constituents and reject this unfair tax scheme. I'm proud to say New Democrat MPs will be doing that. I'm sure a number of Liberal and Conservative MPs want to, as well. They see that the Premier of Ontario is ignoring the people of this province. How can this government ask parliamentarians to support a tax scheme that they themselves rejected just last year?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has put forward a plan that will double the property tax credit for seniors; the NDP are voting against it. We're increasing the Ontario child benefit for low-income Ontarians; the NDP are voting against it. We are making Ontario's tax rate on the first bracket of income the lowest in Canada; the NDP are voting against that. We're lowering the small business tax rate by close to 18%; the NDP are voting against that.

Overall, this $3.4-billion package of tax cuts will create jobs, it will improve investment, and it will provide a brighter future for all Ontarians, their children and grandchildren. It's the right plan for the times and it's the right plan that we will continue to advocate on behalf of.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government criticized the previous Conservative government's corporate tax cuts over 70 times in this very Legislature. Now they've got a $2-billion corporate tax giveaway of their own. They rejected the HST just last year; now they're calling it the most important thing in the entire world.

My question is a very simple one: Has the Acting Premier and his government suddenly had a Conservative epiphany?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We, with the assistance of the federal government and $4.3 billion of assistance, are able to help stimulate pulp and paper mills in northern Ontario and the manufacturing sector in southwestern Ontario. We've also eliminated the capital tax, which everyone has told us was an impediment to job creation. We've been able to bring forward a package of tax cuts that overall will lower taxes for individuals and, yes, for corporations that invest and create jobs right here in Ontario.

This is the right plan. The member opposite is right. It will create 600,000 new jobs. It will improve capital investment. Just two weeks ago, General Electric in Peterborough announced a major new investment. It's about jobs and it's about a brighter future. That's why we've put forward this plan, that's why we will pass it this week and that's why we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not just the Harper Conservative ideas that the McGuinty Liberals are now embracing. In a desperate effort to try to sell the HST, the government has even resorted to hiring their academics. Not long ago, this Acting Premier, the Minister of Finance, called Jack Mintz an Alberta academic whose ideas didn't work. Now they repeat his dubious job claims as if they were written by the hand of God.

Does this Acting Premier really believe this stuff or are his new friendships in Ottawa just a relationship of convenience?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: When one does tax cuts for corporations without cuts for senior citizens and poor kids, yes, that's not the right policy. What's unfortunate is the leader of the third party failed to acknowledge that Jim Stanford, the CAW economist, has signed off on this, saying that its methodology is right and its conclusions accurate. Last week in Windsor, Buzz Hargrove on the radio said that the combined sales tax is the right approach to take.

It is a difficult choice. It does require that we help people understand the importance of it. We acknowledge that. It will create jobs; it will lower taxes; it will help low-income Ontarians. That's why we will continue to pursue it. That's why we'll continue to build a better future for Ontarians. That's why we'll help them understand the complexity of it.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Deputy Premier as well. What do you have to say to the condo owners, health care and home care workers, financial advisers, sports and recreation organizations and seniors who are here with us today who you are blocking from taking part in public consultations and hearings across Ontario while you ram your HST $3-billion tax grab through this Legislature this week?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Later today I'm meeting with the head of the mutual funds industry. I've met with them on three occasions. On Friday I spoke to the chamber of commerce and took questions, as have a number of my colleagues right across the province. We've had more than 33 hours of debate on this issue. I think it's well understood.

Let me reinforce that taxes are being cut overall. First of all, the new HST is not being applied on the condo fee. This is about 600,000 new jobs, more capital investment, more jobs. It's about all of us working together for a better future for Ontario and tax cuts that will come into effect on January 1. I'm not going to let her and her party block that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But he continues to block public consultation. In fact, he's giving Quebec separatists more say on his $3-billion tax grab than he's giving people in this province. I think he should look some of the seniors in the eye around here—

Interjections.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm finding it difficult to hear, and my biggest challenge is from the government side.

Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm going to ask that the Deputy Premier look Ontario's seniors in the eye and tell those living on a fixed income of $40,000 a year how they'll be better off paying $2,100 more in taxes each year. You should answer Doreen Kelly of Orillia, who says the HST "is particularly galling when government agencies (eHealth for one) spend our money like there was no tomorrow and we are expected to increase our tax burden to make up the shortfall."

Deputy Premier, will you show some guts and hold public hearings on your HST, $3-billion tax grab?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We're holding public hearings, as I understand it, later this week. There will be representatives of those groups speaking.

I will look Ontario seniors in the eye and say that, in fact, on January 1 your income taxes will be cut, unless that member and her party block it this week. So we're not going to let them do that. The property tax credit for Ontario seniors will be doubled, unless that member and her party try to block it in the House today.

It is a difficult issue. We are doing our best to help people see all sides of it, to see the entire package. We will continue to do that. We are having public—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek can take their cross-chamber debate outside, please.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We're proceeding this week. This is the right package, which, according to the Conservatives' own expert, will create jobs, lower taxes overall and improve this economy for our children and our grandchildren. That is the single most important thing all of us can do.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. In a desperate effort to pretend the HST has anything at all to do with job creation, the Premier hired an economist that the minister once labelled as "an Alberta academic" whose ideas simply don't work. Jack Mintz's predictions are so unbelievable, they have been written off as dubious at best.

If the HST is so good for job creation, why didn't the Atlantic provinces see a spike in jobs after the HST was implemented there?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As Mr. Mintz and Mr. Martin pointed out, as was peer-reviewed by Jim Stanford, in fact, they did. They also pointed out what makes this package different even from those experiences, and that is the range of tax cuts, including tax cuts for Ontario's most vulnerable, that will not only stimulate job growth in the long term, but likely in the short term as well.

It is important that we do everything in our power to create jobs: All of the experts tell us 600,000. It will improve incomes and improve capital investment. We saw that in Peterborough just two weeks ago, with GE making a very substantial investment, in part as a result of our package. We will continue to work with Ontarians as we move to implementation for what is the best policy that any government can bring forward to help improve this economy in the coming years and months.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm just sending the Finance Minister a copy of the jobs that were actually created in the Maritimes. Three provinces bought into the HST in 1997—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland—but high joblessness remained after implementation, just like their neighbour that didn't harmonize, PEI. The Atlantic provinces saw no changes to their unemployment rate until they were lucky enough to strike oil.

How can the Premier and the finance minister believe Jack Mintz's forecast when the evidence clearly shows that workers saw little benefit from the HST in those three provinces?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Because none of those provinces brought in the complete package of tax cuts that we are bringing forward. I do, I say to my colleague opposite, agree with Hugh Mackenzie, a very prominent New Democrat who I know has advised your caucus against this silly position you're taking. Here's what he said: "Ontario's 2009-10 budget establishes the right direction for the next few years. It provides substantial economic stimulus. It is consistent with the new orthodoxy that relies heavily on governments to help rebuild damaged economies.... It increases support for low-income families and individuals. It modernizes Ontario's consumption tax."

I stand with Hugh Mackenzie, I stand with those who see the importance of helping to rebuild this economy with the comprehensive package of tax reforms that will create jobs, lower taxes for 93% of Ontarians and help build a better future for all.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, as you know, the mistreatment and abuse of animals has been a long-time concern of mine and my constituents in Eglinton–Lawrence. This weekend's media reports of alleged mistreatment of animals are most upsetting to all of us. I was deeply disturbed by the allegations and charges reported in recent media stories over the last week stemming from the OSPCA's investigation of the Toronto Humane Society.

I know I speak for many of my constituents and Ontarians when I say that the health and welfare of the animals in the Toronto Humane Society is a very important issue. Minister, can you please shed some light on these recent events?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: This member is a tireless advocate for animal welfare in Ontario and I want to thank him for this very important question. First, let me say that this matter is now before the courts and it would be inappropriate to comment on the specifics surrounding this case.

Also, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals operates independently of the government and we are not involved in the day-to-day operations. Most importantly, the well-being of animals is the paramount concern under the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The society is authorized to enforce any law in Ontario pertaining to the welfare of animals. Also, under the legislation the OSPCA has a number of options to require that proper standards of care are met in any situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm glad you are taking this most disturbing issue very seriously. It's good to hear that the OSPCA has the tools needed to protect these defenceless animals.

For most Ontarians, animals are more than just pets; they're members of our families. That's why many of us are strong advocates of strengthening and updating the OSPCA legislation, so that those who mistreat animals are held accountable for their actions and so that those who enforce animal welfare laws have the legislative framework through which to best protect animals. Can the minister inform the House how the new provincial animal welfare legislation just passed in this House strengthens the OSPCA Act and how this better protects our beloved pets and animals?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again I want to thank the member for a very important question. Our government

is committed to a strong animal welfare system in Ontario. Last year I was pleased to introduce the Provincial Animal Welfare Act; that modernizes and strengthens the OSPCA Act for the first time in more than 90 years, bringing Ontario from worst in Canada to first for animal protection. The act provides tough new rules and penalties including jail, fines and a potential lifetime ownership ban. It also ensures that veterinarians are able to report suspected abuse and neglect, and gives the OSPCA enhanced powers to protect animals kept for sale, for use, for exhibit or for entertainment. Since 2003, our government has quadrupled the annual funding for the OSPCA to support the cost of training animal cruelty investigators around this province.

1110

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: My question is to the wannabe Premier—I mean, the Acting Premier. Is it wannabe or acting? I'm not sure. I have a really simple question for you to answer. How much more will taxpayers have to come up with to cover the cost of the HST for municipalities, hospitals, universities and schools? How much more are we going to have to come up with?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. If the member had a chance to review the March 2009 budget and, as well, the fall budget bill before the House, he would know that we have arranged to have rebates for what is broadly known as the MUSH sector: municipalities, universities, social services, hospitals, charities and school boards are great examples. It's important that we ensure that those groups that we fund receive a rebate so they are put in the same position.

I would say to municipalities, for example, in other provinces where there is a harmonized sales tax, the amount of the rebate is either 0% or 50%. Here in Ontario, it will be some 78%, because according to StatsCan and the information that we've been given, that is what's required to ensure that there is neither an upload nor a download on our municipal partners. This same principle applies, for example, to school boards, where it will be at 93%, and to hospitals at 87%. All of these things have been designed to ensure that this is revenue-neutral to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I hear all this mumbo-jumbo talk from the minister up there, and I was hoping that the finance minister would answer this. Maybe, then, you can tell me—you keep throwing out this 600,000 jobs—other than a whole lot of jobs being created at the Star, I'm just wondering where you're creating any other jobs.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I've had an opportunity to remind people that we are competing for new jobs in the 21st century, and we cannot compete for jobs in the 21st century with a tax system that was created in 1961. I know the member opposite remembers 1961; I know it was a very good year for you. But it has been 48 years since then, and as a result, it's important that we modernize our tax system.

A hundred and thirty other countries around the world and four of our sister provinces have decided that they need to modernize their tax systems.

What will happen in Ontario, of course, is we're ensuring that our businesses, which are the number one source of new jobs, are actually able to compete on the world stage. Here in Ontario, we export some 80% of what we make. It is so important for us to be competitive. I know that when our exporters are not doing well, as a province we can't do well.

As the federal government knows, you can't have a strong Canada and a weak Ontario. That's why we're working together to ensure that we have some 600,000 more jobs in the province of Ontario, more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NUCLEAR POWER FACILITIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The question is for the Acting Premier. The Pickering nuclear power plant is the oldest in Canada. Two and a half million people live within 30 kilometres of the plant. No reactor today would be built this close to so many people.

In the case of a nuclear accident, the federal government is proposing to cap liability for nuclear plant operators at $650 million. Is the McGuinty government satisfied that $650 million is sufficient to compensate two and a half million people should there be an accident at the Pickering plant?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I think the public probably know this, but I just remind us that we've been producing electricity from nuclear for, I think, 40 years now. Fifty-five per cent of all of our power is produced by nuclear. We have three terrific plants—one in Pickering, one in Darlington and one in Grey–Bruce—with an impeccable safety record.

So I just say to the public, we have a lot of experience in this. First and foremost is safety. For many years now, well over half our power has been produced by nuclear—and a terrific safety record. I think the public should feel confident about the future. We have a lot of respect and confidence in the operators of those three plants. They are an integral part of our electrical system, and we're very proud of their safety record.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's no surprise that the minister didn't answer the question. He talked about safety but did not talk about risk.

Frankly, Minister, the reason that nuclear plant operators want to limit liability is because they understand the scale of risk that they would incur if something went wrong.

Is this government prepared to support the NDP in calling for a move on that liability cap to international standards?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Again, I rely, I dare say, on expert advice from our nuclear regulators. I appreciate that you may have a view on it, and I may have a view on it, but I rely on the experts. I say once again that 55% of our power is produced by this.

One of the telling points to me, as we're looking at new sites, was that both the community in Darlington and the community, I must say, in Grey–Bruce—

Interjection: Huron.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Huron–Bruce; I'm sorry—who have a lot of experience with this, urged us to build there. Why? Because they are confident about the safety, about the future and about them as being a terrific employer.

You may have a view on it; I may have a view on it. I tend to rely on the experts, and we follow the expert advice.

By the way, I might also say that we have been able to reduce the use of coal dramatically. One of the reasons is we have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is to the Minister of Revenue.

Minister, at a time when we face the most difficult and challenging economic downturn since the Second World War, people understandably have some hesitation about large changes to our tax system. Seniors are concerned about staying in their homes, and parents are concerned about supporting their children.

I know the federal government has signalled its support for the transition to our job-creating tax package with the $4.3 billion they are providing to Ontario.

As the federal government introduces harmonization legislation, will the minister tell us what he is telling them about why this is so important to Ontarians?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question and, as well, to welcome your family here visiting today.

I know the personal story of your family. I know the story of your family and the sacrifices they made so that you could find the success you have today representing the good people of Hamilton Mountain. They understood that when times change, people have to change, and that when times change, it's important for governments to understand the nature of that change and to take advantage of that change to build a brighter and prosperous future for their children, something that you are the beneficiary of, as are all of us in this House. It is so important.

As I've gone across Ontario speaking to more than three dozen different groups, they've all agreed that the world has changed, and they are reassured that their government, working in partnership with the federal government, has set aside partisan concerns, ideological concerns, and understands that to have a strong Canada, one must have a strong and vibrant—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: The manufacturing industry plays an important role in my riding of Hamilton Mountain and in many ridings across Ontario. Companies in my riding have been hard hit by job losses as a result of the global economic recession.

Recently, a great Hamilton company named BartonAir Fabrications Inc. won the Small Business Award at the Ontario Business Achievement Awards after being nominated by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is supportive of the HST. In fact, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce website states that our comprehensive tax package will create jobs and make Ontario more competitive.

Will the minister tell us what the effects of the HST are going to be on BartonAir Fabrications and Ontario's manufacturing sector?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that you were also at the chamber's business excellence awards and the Global Traders Awards, and we were inspired by the work of so many other companies, but particularly Barton from Hamilton. I know why you're so very proud of them.

You know, manufacturers overall, under our tax reform package, will see over a billion dollars a year, net, of savings to their businesses, allowing them to do three things: it allows them, those that are struggling, of course, to hang on through this recession, and it's so important that they do that; it allows them to purchase new equipment and improve their productivity so that they can be more competitive; and it allows them to hire more people.

We have bright companies in Ontario that have a bright future, but it's important for their government to understand that we are in the 21st century, we are competing around the world, and we need to do those things that are important to ensure that we have a high quality of life. It's exactly that success that will allow us to pay for the public services that we value in this province, our public—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I promised those driver instructors in the gallery and those out on the front lawn to ask this question to the Premier, but I guess I'll have to ask it to the Acting Premier. Truck drivers and driving school instructors are encircling this Queen's Park building in their vehicles as we speak, while hundreds more are gathered on the front lawn. They are students, new immigrants, small business owners. They're gathered on the front lawn to protest your inaction in ending the 16-week-old DriveTest strike. So my question to the Acting

Premier is this: Given your failure to act, is it the intention of the McGuinty government to put 10,000 driving instructors out of work, truck drivers out of business and force small businesses into bankruptcy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to first acknowledge all those who are here—the truck driving schools, the driving schools, the young and new drivers who are being impacted by this work stoppage.

I can empathize with those who are being inconvenienced by this situation, but the best deal is a negotiated settlement. It is one where the parties work together—these are difficult situations—to find common ground at the table. These deals are the most stable, the most productive, the best deals for our province and for labour—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I was saying, a negotiated settlement, a negotiated agreement, is the best agreement that we can have here in the province. It provides for stability. It also provides in the short and long term for the best productivity of that company and their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I say to the minister, that's ridiculous. It's been almost four months since this strike started; 368,000 Ontarians are in the backlog to get their drivers' licences, and that number grows by 4,000 people a day. Have you no conscience? Small businesses are going bankrupt. People are losing their jobs. New immigrants can't get a licence, which is a requirement of their visa to get a job.

One of the people in the galleries today is Mr. Shafique Malik, and he owns ABM Driving School, which has six locations in the GTA. He employs 40 driving instructors and he told me a few minutes ago that they've had to max out their lines of credit and credit cards just to feed their families and pay their mortgages. ABM Driving School and hundreds of others will be out of business if you don't solve this strike immediately.

Why are you sitting on your duffs? Why don't you care? You need the jobs. These people need to go to work, they need to feed their families. Why won't you end this strike immediately?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This member has a lot of gall because that Conservative government over there—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: That member is sitting next to the architect of this agreement, his seatmate right over there, Mr. Norm Sterling.

What I can say is that this government respects the collective bargaining process. Over 97% of all labour relations are done without any work stoppage in this province. That is an excellent record. We have some of the best—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can say about the two parties is that they have had two weeks to look at what is on the table, to see where they can resolve their differences, where they can find that common ground. Our mediators, who are among the best in all of Canada, are there to assist the parties. We will do everything we can to assist—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last week Nortel announced that it was paying out $7.5 million in bonuses to make life just a little more comfortable for 72 of its favourite executives. At least 14 of these executives will earn more than half a million dollars this year. At the same time, thousands of Nortel workers are facing a 30% cut in their pensions, with no help from the Ontario government.

How can this government allow Nortel to shove bonus money out the door to its top executives while at the same time sticking it to its loyal workers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think the leader of the third party raises a very valid point. It is absolutely incredible, from my perspective. We are wrestling with the Nortel pension situation, as we are with a number of other situations. As the member knows, the pension benefits guarantee fund, which has been in place I think since 1981, has never been properly funded. We have Nortel, Abitibi-Bowater and a number of others facing similar challenges. We are looking at the whole situation overall, but I must say that I concur with her analysis of that unfortunate decision.

I'm not certain that Ontario, even if it wanted to, could intervene to prevent that; however, I think she raises a very valid issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nortel workers are being let down by both the company and the McGuinty government. On the one hand, Nortel continues its long tradition of lavishing exorbitant bonuses on its senior executives. Who could forget the $132 million they paid to former CEO John Roth? On the other hand, the McGuinty government refuses to follow the lead of the Quebec government and come up with a creative solution for the Nortel pension crisis.

Why does this government stand on the sidelines and do nothing while Nortel shovels money out the door to its senior executives, and its workers get a 30% cut in their hard-earned pensions?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, Quebec followed what we had done earlier, so in fact, we have done what Quebec did. That is not to mitigate or for one moment to suggest that the concerns of those people whose pensions are affected aren't real; they are very real. They're very real for other people. The government is looking at this situation. We've had the opportunity to meet with Nortel pensioners. I concur with the member's analysis about

the inequity associated with that. I can't say that I disagree with her; I think she's absolutely right about that.

We'll continue to work with these employees who are affected. We will also be working with others in the hopes, sir, that we can minimize any challenges associated with the circumstances that those pensioners find themselves in.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. Our government is investing substantial sums to improve infrastructure around this province. Much of this investment is in transportation infrastructure. In fact, I understand that in 2009-10, we're spending more than $2.4 billion to design, repair and expand highways, roads and bridges across this great province. I've been told that this is an all-time record and a 25% increase over last year's budget.

Last Thursday, there were questions raised in this House about two highway contract awards. The circumstances described in these questions did not sound to me like the way we do business in Peterborough. Would the Minister of Transportation be able to share with this House the facts surrounding the awarding of these contracts, beginning with the Highway 402 work?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to let the members of the House know that the company referenced last week by my colleague opposite as having been awarded the Highway 402 contract in fact did not win that contract. There was an appeal process that took place, but the courts ultimately upheld the Ministry of Transportation's original award of the contract to Bot Construction. As my friend Bob Bailey would know, Bot Construction, not the company named by my colleague opposite, is the company currently doing the work on Highway 402.

We are pleased to see this highway improvement project moving forward in the riding of Sarnia–Lambton. It's an important project that is generating 540 jobs at a time when they are most needed, as I'm sure the member for Sarnia–Lambton agrees. I think it's important to get these matters brought to the House in an accurate fashion and to see that we have a transparent form of awarding contracts.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd like to thank the minister for clarifying to this House the details of the 402 contract. I know that our government's infrastructure program is helping to fight the recession.

In the case of transportation infrastructure, we're also investing in our own economic future by building public transit, highways and bridges. I recognize that these improvements will make it easier to do business in Ontario and help more goods and people move efficiently. These investments put people back to work. Altogether, the infrastructure program is generating 50,000 jobs over two years. One of these investments in infrastructure improvement work currently is Highway 417 to Arnprior. This is also the second contract that was questioned last week in the House. I'm asking the Minister of Transportation: Share with this House the facts on this contract.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The contract for work on Highway 417 to Arnprior in the riding of the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is a matter currently before the courts. I cannot comment on the specifics of the matter, other than to note that, like all other MTO contracts, it was tendered in a fair, open and transparent manner. I can also say that earlier this year I met with my friend for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the municipality of Renfrew, who thanked the McGuinty government for proceeding with the project, which they've been advocating for years. The project will four-lane nearly six kilometres of Highway 417, generating some 575 jobs.

I would like to thank the member for giving me the opportunity to clarify the facts before the House and to point out once again that we have an open, transparent and fair way of awarding contracts.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, I wrote you on November 5, 2009, regarding my senior Cambridge constituent whom you have refused to supply a drug that has delayed the progression of her cancer. You have refused to answer that urgent letter.

As both my constituent's kidneys have been removed, she obtains dialysis in Kitchener after taking the public bus three times a week, her husband being unable to drive her as he works full-time to support them.

Can the minister explain how this government could deny my constituent coverage for a chemotherapy drug that for three years has been improving her quality of life, especially now that you have finally relented on the drug Avastin?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important to say that we are committed to the most excellent health care for people in Ontario. We are expanding the range of drugs that are available to Ontarians. This weekend I was very happy to announce that we are going to be able to lift the cap on coverage for Avastin.

In the case of the constituent, I think it's important to acknowledge that our coverage is not a political decision; it is not the politicians who decide what drugs are covered, nor should it be. We have set up an independent committee to evaluate drugs. It is that committee that was able to negotiate a better price that has allowed us to expand coverage of Avastin. That Committee to Evaluate Drugs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: No, Minister, you cannot hide behind a nameless bureaucrat. Minister, the chemotherapy drug in question, Nexavar, costs approximately $3,200 a month, and has been paid for by a private plan for three years but is now maxed out. My constituent cannot afford the drug and has been forced to stop taking it. Will the minister explain why a private plan has pro-

vided coverage for three years while you, on behalf of this government, refuse coverage completely? Why have you condemned my constituent?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, private plans insure services that are not covered by the public system. That is the nature of private plans. That is why people buy private plans.

We take our responsibility to patients very seriously. We also take our responsibility to taxpayers very seriously. The Committee to Evaluate Drugs has been charged with the very difficult responsibility of finding the balance between doing everything we can for patients while at the same time respecting the fact that these are drugs that are covered by taxpayers. Finding that right balance is their responsibility. It is not my responsibility to make those very difficult clinical decisions. Frankly, I don't have that background and, with respect, neither does the member opposite.

TAXATION

M^me^ France Gélinas: My question is for the Acting Premier. In 2004, your government delisted chiropractic care and physiotherapy, among other services. This decision burdened an already strained health care system and has forced Ontarians to pay out of pocket or go without the care they need. Now Ontarians will be forced to pay 8% more for these services.

So Eric Boucher, Tammy Dimatteo, Nancy Carrière, Celyne Sulston—all health care professionals from my riding—want to know, why is this government taking health care out of reach for Ontarians?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we're expanding health care, whether you measure it in the volume of dollars expended or in the wait times that have been cut by this government. And of course, you do have to set priorities.

I'm proud of our record in reducing wait times. I'm proud of our record of investments in new health care initiatives. I'm proud of our initiatives in some of the capital investments we've made to help rebuild our health care sector.

I will say this: The tax cut package we're bringing forward will help low-income Ontarians. I wish that member and her party would support it and not try to block the passage of it. The doubling of the seniors' property tax credit: another important tax break for seniors. I wish you wouldn't vote against that.

We are determined to make this economy create more jobs, to raise incomes and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^me^ France Gélinas: The 8% HST is now going to be applied to those services. It's going to make massage therapy, chiropractic care and physiotherapy out of reach of many Ontarians. We know that access to these therapies can go a long way toward preventing and correcting health problems before they end up in an acute situation, needing hospital care or more expensive care. The decision to force Ontarians to pay 8% more will end up costing the government's health care budget a far greater price as those people end up in emerg and end up in the hospital.

My question is simple: Will the government exempt professional services by health care practitioners from the HST?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The tax package will help those people to access service. And unlike that member—you know, your party delisted prescription drugs. Your party laid off nurses. That member and her party reduced the number of medical school spaces. That member and her party reduced all aspects of medical care in this province while they were raising taxes on low-income Ontarians.

I wish she could see the benefit in the Ontario child benefit, which will help families of very modest means access more medicines and access better food for their children—all important health determinants. Why would you vote against that? Why would you vote against cutting taxes for seniors? Why would you vote against doubling the seniors' property—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to correct an oversight by the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and officially welcome Bill Goetz, the warden of Bruce, to the Legislature as well.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question by the Minister of Revenue concerning the HST. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. tomorrow.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Cambridge has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question by the Minister of Health. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. tomorrow.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Nepean–Carleton has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question by the Minister of Finance regarding the HST. This matter will be debated at six o'clock tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have the pleasure of introducing to you and to the House Dr. Michael Tam, from

the Longevity Foundation, and they are celebrating this year the first anniversary of their subcommittee, which is called the anti-aging subcommittee. Congratulations to them.

I have the distinct pleasure also to introduce to you and to the House the six-member delegation from our sister organization in the People's Republic of China, Jiangsu Province. They're here and they are being led by Mr. Jin Xiangping, Mr. Zhu Laigen, Mr. Geng Zhong, Mr. Wang Fei, Ms. Yao Fenghua and Ms. Chen Huaying. Congratulations and welcome to the Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAVID MARSHALL

Mr. Toby Barrett: On Friday, I joined people from across Haldimand county, Ontario, Canada and beyond in marking the passing of the Honourable Justice Dr. T. David Marshall. His accomplishments as a judge, lawyer and doctor were great, but David Marshall was so much more. Justice Marshall embodied integrity, honesty, kindness, hard work, perseverance and love of family, community and country. A consummate gentleman who never put himself above others, he made life better for people.

Born in Wainfleet, and a graduate of Dunnville Secondary School and Ridley College, Marshall earned his medical degree in 1962 at the University of Toronto and his law degree from Osgoode Hall in 1970. He wrote books, painted, farmed and raised Belted Galloway cattle, and chickens and horses.

Marshall earned his pilot's licence, learned diesel mechanics, dabbled in politics and became an honorary chief of Six Nations. While many travel the world, Marshall's journey saw him serve as a missionary doctor in South America, a Supreme Court justice in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, as well as a doctor for the Northern Command at Yellowknife between 1982 and 1992.

Most recently he was appointed the colonel commandant of the medical branch of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Dr. Marshall is survived by his wife, Jill; children, Jill, Julie, Albert, Tom and David; plus 10 grandchildren. Our thoughts are with them.

ROB TURNER

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: Recently a group of individuals gathered at Sheridan College's Davis campus in Brampton to pay tribute to outgoing Sheridan president Dr. Rob Turner. The occasion was a ceremony during which a building on the campus was named the Dr. Rob Turner Building. Dr. Turner, who is scheduled to retire from Sheridan at the end of the year, accomplished much during his time as president of the college.

While leading Sheridan College, he spearheaded 35 new programs and moved Sheridan to a degree-granting institution. When Dr. Turner arrived at Sheridan, the college had one site, the Oakville campus, with courses in animation, business and applied health sciences. In the past nine years, Sheridan has grown to three sites. The addition of the Davis campus in Brampton has added over 7,000 students enrolled in the Centre for Advanced Manufacturing and Design Technologies, and with the investment of over $31 million by this government, Sheridan Mississauga will soon be a reality, delivering a range of business programs to 1,700 full-time and 7,500 part-time students in a new instructional and laboratory complex. During Dr. Turner's tenure with Sheridan, 52,000 students have graduated into the workforce.

While well deserved, retirement won't come easy to Dr. Turner, who's either worked as a vice-president or a president since his mid-20s. Both he and his wife, Judy, are looking forward to retiring and taking some time to smell the flowers in their home in Victoria, BC.

I know all members of this House will join me in thanking Dr. Turner for the value he added to the education of young people in our province over the last nine years and wish him well in his retirement.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the great work of the Ontario Agri Business Association and welcome them to Queen's Park today.

As you may know, the Ontario Agri Business Association is celebrating 10 years of service to the crop input, grain and animal feed industry. This sector provides essential products and services valued at over $5 billion to Ontario's 57,000 farmers.

The crop input, grain and feed industry plays a key role in the delivery of nutritious and safe food to Ontarians every day. During their visit to Queen's Park today, the association representatives have brought a reusable grocery bag filled with a sampling of made-in-Ontario food and consumer products that demonstrates the diversity and innovation of Ontario's agriculture, agri-business and food processing.

In many rural communities across this province, the local agri-business often serves as a focal point for the economy, economic activity and employment. Agri-business is an integral part of Ontario's rural infrastructure, our rural economy and our rural communities.

The crop input, grain and feed industry serves as the employer for over 8,000 Ontarians, with an annual payroll of more than $275 million. I want to thank all the agri-business representatives for coming to Queen's Park to update us on the state of their industry and share the concerns of their farms operating in rural communities across Ontario.

I hope that all the members in this Legislature will take time to visit their reception this evening in committee rooms 228 and 230 to learn more about Ontario's crop input, grain and feed industry.

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this statement on their behalf.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. David Zimmer: I, like all of us, am looking forward to the 2015 Pan Am Games here in Ontario. It's exciting news. It's a great example of partnership between different levels of government, the sports community and many others.

Hosting these games creates new and improved athletic facilities that help our communities engage in healthier active living. What's more, the games are expected to inject billions into Ontario's economy and create about 15,000 jobs.

There's another benefit to these games that I'd like to highlight. To house the 10,000 athletes and officials who will come to compete at the games, a new housing development will be built in Toronto's west Donlands. One of the great things about this housing development is that after the games, these units will be turned over as affordable housing units for Ontarians, to benefit Ontario long after the games are gone.

This is an important part of the legacy of the 2015 Pan Am Games. It's an important legacy to the affordable housing needs of Ontario. It will showcase our athletes and region to the world but ultimately it will help to improve our communities here in Toronto and support Ontarians with new affordable housing units.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: As you know, this is St. Andrew's Day, and I know we all want to celebrate that.

The people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound elected me to represent them. I serve them, I listen to them and I represent them. Sadly, many members across the aisle have chosen to serve the Premier rather than serve their constituents. He does not deserve that kind of support.

Our caucus believes that the families who will be forced to pay the Dalton McGuinty HST should be allowed to have their say before the tax is passed. Public hearings: It is a simple idea, but not for this Premier. This Premier chooses to hide. This Premier chooses to deny the public any opportunity to have their say.

Dalton McGuinty once promised he would not raise taxes. He told Ontario families he would stay out of their pockets. We know how that ended up: First, higher income taxes, and now, higher sales tax as well.

Dalton McGuinty once said he believed in public hearings. Now he's shutting them down. Where I come from, we call that a cop-out. Where I come from, Dalton McGuinty is a liar.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: No, sir. I believe that is true, and I cannot withdraw that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll give the honourable member a second opportunity to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I'm not the liar, sir.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I give the honourable member a third opportunity to withdraw the comment.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will have to call the Sergeant-at-Arms and will have to name Bill Murdoch, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed for 15 minutes.

The House recessed from 1310 to 1328.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has been named, and I would ask him once again to please leave the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to remind the member that, pursuant to standing order 15(c), if the Speaker determines that force is necessary to compel obedience, the member shall be suspended for the remainder of the session. I further want to remind the honourable member that the definition of the end of a session is at prorogation.

With that, I will continue to ignore the member and we will continue with the business of the House.

Members' statements? The member for York–South Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed for 15 minutes.

The House recessed from 1330 to 1345.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I once again want to remind the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound that you have been suspended from the service of this House for the remainder of the session. I'm giving you another opportunity to leave.

I would remind other members that upon being called to order and upon being named, those members being named and refusing to leave will also be suspended for the remainder of the session.

I call the members to order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Durham to please come to order. I ask the member from Burlington to please come to order, the member from Simcoe North to please come to order, the member from Dufferin–Caledon to please come to order, the member from Oshawa to please come to order, and the member from Haldimand–Norfolk to please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Haldimand–Norfolk to please come to order. I ask

the member for Lanark to please come to order. I ask the member from Oxford to please come to order.

We will continue with members' statements. The member from York South–Weston.

Interjections.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Flu activity continues to be higher than what Ontario typically has seen in the peak of past regular flu seasons. Medical experts are encouraging all Ontarians to roll up their sleeves and get the H1N1 flu vaccine.

So far, over 2.5 million Ontarians have already received the shot, and our government continues to work with our dedicated health care partners to ensure that every Ontarian who wants the vaccine can get it. The vaccine is now available for the general public. Everyone from infants aged six months and older to Ontario seniors can get the shot.

Worldwide studies have shown that the vaccine is safe and effective. Ontario's chief medical officer of health has said it is the best defence Ontarians have against the H1N1 flu virus.

What's more, our government has committed the necessary resources to make sure Ontarians can get the shot. The vaccine can be obtained in over 100 public health units and in over 4,200 physicians' offices across Ontario.

Getting the vaccine is a much safer way to develop immunity without having to suffer from the effects of developing H1N1 flu. Everyone is therefore encouraged to get in line for the shot.

Interjections.

1350

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): For the second time, I would like to remind the members who are causing disorder within the House that if I'm forced to name those individuals, and if named and those members refuse to leave, they too will be suspended for the remainder of the session.

MEDICAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Dr. Tam is here today to celebrate the anti-aging society's first anniversary and to thank the McGuinty government for its foresight in supporting research and innovation in the biomedical field and for establishing the Ministry of Health Promotion, presently headed by Minister Best.

While these are significant accomplishments, the anti-aging society is encouraging our government to focus on three fields of research and innovation: (1) biomedical breakthroughs, (2) lifestyle changes, and (3) mind and body connections.

Modern biomedical science now treats aging as a disease which leads to a breakdown of various parts of the body. Aging symptoms can be reversed by increasing human growth hormone levels. More research is needed.

The American Cancer Society is saying that a third of all cancers could be prevented through exercise, diet and weight management. We need additional educational programs to convince our citizens.

The anti-aging society thinks human beings' needs are also not only physical, biochemical and nutritional but social and spiritual. If we neglect our social and spiritual needs, we harm the physical organism. By changing our thinking from thoughts of revenge, jealousy or hate to thoughts of generosity, forgiveness or love, we demonstrate real changes in the biochemistry of our bodies.

I want to thank Dr. Tam for his trailblazing Another Path to Healing. Congratulations to him and Women's College Hospital, which is trying to integrate this new healing method in its present patient care for more efficient and long-lasting recovery. Congratulations to Dr. Tam.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will ask the members to please come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Leeds–Grenville to please come to order.

I just want to remind the members that if subsequent interjections are going to continue, I'm going to be dealing with one member at a time and will be asking you to come to order. I will give you a warning if you refuse to come to order. I will then be forced to begin naming members.

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Vic Dhillon: We are joined in the Legislature today by representatives from the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. I would like to thank them for their continued support.

As many in this Legislature already know, dairy is Ontario's largest agricultural sector. Ontario's dairy industry produces more than 2.5 billion litres of milk each year on the over 4,000 dairy farms across Ontario and employs thousands of Ontarians.

During the recent global economic crisis, when many of Ontario's businesses were impacted, the stability on dairy and poultry farms that existed during this time is a testament to the effectiveness of Ontario's supply management systems and to the good work of Ontario's dairy farmers.

Currently, Dairy Farmers of Ontario's members are producing an on-farm value of more than $1.6 billion.

Ontario's dairy farmers have been able to keep supplying high-quality, healthy local food to Ontario consumers while making all their returns from the marketplace and not having to rely on the taxpayer.

By working closely with the processing sector, Ontario dairy farmers are able to meet the needs of the

domestic market while, at the same time, pursuing opportunities on the world market.

I would like to thank the dairy farmers for their contributions to our great province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order.

This is a final warning to all members of the House. Anyone banging on their desks will be named and I'll be asking the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort them from the chamber for the remainder of the day.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Lanark to please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Lanark.

I've been forced to name Randy Hillier, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, and ask that he please leave the chamber.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member once again. I remind the member that, pursuant to standing order 15(c), if the Speaker determines that force is necessary in order to compel obedience, the member shall be suspended for the remainder of the session.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is not debatable. The member has been named and has been asked to leave the chamber. If you are going to be leaving the chamber with force, you are suspended for the remainder of the session.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Sergeant-at-Arms informs me that force is necessary.

I do name, under standing order 15(c), Randy Hillier, the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I again remind the member that the definition is "until the end of the session."

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 212, An Act to promote good government by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting two new Acts / Projet de loi 212, Loi visant à promouvoir une saine gestion publique en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois et en édictant deux nouvelles lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? I heard a no.

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1358 to 1403.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in flavour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine
Albanese, Laura	Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Jaczek, Helena	Orazietti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Best, Margarett	Johnson, Rick	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Carroll, Aileen	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Mauro, Bill	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 2009, Bill 212 is ordered for third reading.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 12 midnight on Monday, November 30, 2009.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1407 to 1412.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Gerretsen, John	Moridi, Reza
Arnott, Ted	Gravelle, Michael	Munro, Julia
Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Hudak, Tim	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Johnson, Rick	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Best, Margarett	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Carroll, Aileen	Leal, Jeff	Savoline, Joyce
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Crozier, Bruce	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sousa, Charles
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Sterling, Norman W.
Duguid, Brad	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Dunlop, Garfield	McNeely, Phil	Witmer, Elizabeth
Elliott, Christine	Meilleur, Madeleine	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Norm	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 63; the nays are 5.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We'll revert to introduction of bills. Motions? Statements by ministries? Petitions?

PETITIONS

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just like to remind the honourable member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and the honourable member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound that both members have been named and have been asked to leave the chamber.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Because I have asked—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You are disrespecting all duly elected members of this Legislature. You are being disrespectful to them. You're being disrespectful to the people who are sitting in the gallery. These students—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member knows very clearly the rules.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, because the honourable member has been named.

Continue with petitions.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House is in recess for 15 minutes.

The House recessed from 1417 to 1435.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just wanted to take this opportunity to address the House and clear up some issues about process that may be in some members' minds.

I'd like to remind the members that there is a distinct difference between the situation presenting itself today and the one that Speaker McLean dealt with on December 6, 1995. Then, the House was in the middle of a vote. Under the rules of the day, members were required to vote. The Speaker, in that situation, could not proceed with the business of the House until the completion of the vote. The vote could not be completed until the members present all voted.

Today there is nothing in the standing orders that stands in the way of the business of the House continuing.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment—

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, once again I move that pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Thursday, December 3, 2009, during its regular meeting times for

the purpose of public hearings on the bill and following routine proceedings on Monday, December 7, 2009, for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Friday, December 4, 2009. At 5 p.m. on Monday, December 7, 2009, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, December 8, 2009. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

1440

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of the second reading or third reading votes allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please come to order. The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition will come to order. The member from Durham will please come to order. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will please come to order. The member from Oxford will please come to order. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka will please come to order. The member from Leeds–Grenville will please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I've asked the honourable member from Oxford once to please come to order. And I ask the member from Renfrew to please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the two honourable members that they have both been suspended from this House for the duration of the session.

Further debate? The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to begin debate on a time allocation motion that will allow the government and this Parliament to move forward on an initiative that is extremely important to the future of this province.

It's very important that we move ahead with this legislation—591,000 jobs, according to Jack Mintz and a third party report that was commissioned by the government, but commissioned in a way that was put out to allow for others to bid on this particular piece of work. What this report said is that it's going to create 591,000 jobs.

We're not just talking about placing the HST on some products. We're talking about very, very significant tax cuts—tax cuts that will ensure that 93,000 people in this province will indeed benefit, that 93,000 people will see a reduction in their income taxes. The vast majority of Ontarians are going to benefit substantially from this particular approach.

The HST is something that this province needs if we're going to be competitive. That's what our goal is. If there's anything that's important for us to do here in this Legislature, it's to ensure that we're building a stronger province for that next generation of Ontarians, a stronger province so that my kids, who happen to be 14 years old and 15 years old—actually, 13 years old and 14 years old; they'll be turning 14 and 15 when this legislation, with the will of the House, is passed and moves forward. Its their future that we're here to support. It's their future that we're here to build. Their future is why this government is certainly taking the political risk of moving forward boldly on an initiative that is complex, but an initiative that's going to serve that next generation, those young people, very, very well.

I'm thinking of my kids today. It's obvious the opposition, as they play political games with this legislation, as they pretend that they're opposed to this bill when no more than six months ago their leader stood up and said that this is exactly what we should be doing—he knows, in good conscience, as he knew back then, that this is something the province simply has to do.

If we're going to be competitive as a jurisdiction, if we're going to ensure that my kids—like I said, Kennedy and Jordan are 13 and 14. I want to do everything that I can to ensure that my kids have the same opportunities that your kids have, Mr. Speaker, that the Attorney General's kids have, that the kids of my good friends behind me have, that my good friend Mario's grandkids are going to have, that my friend Mike Colle's kids and grandkids are going to have, and my good friend Dave Levac, the member from—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Speaker: I believe the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, in his comments a few minutes ago, said something that was very unparliamentary, and I ask him to withdraw it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I was unable to hear because of the noise of the House and would ask the honourable member, being an honourable member, if he said something unparliamentary, to please withdraw.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I didn't say anything unparliamentary, but if anybody was offended by my talking about the HST, I'll withdraw whatever—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Brad Duguid: What I was talking about when I was interrupted was the importance for the next generation. This is why we're working so hard to do what we're doing. This is why the government of Canada, which understands this, as do a number of our federal colleagues—they understand the importance of moving forward.

It's not easy. We recognize it's not easy. We recognize it's a tough decision. But, look, when my kids look me in the eyes 10 years from now, when the kids of my colleagues on this side of the House look them in the eyes 10 years from now, or their grandkids, and they say, "When we were going through the toughest time that we've gone through in 80 years"—and that's what we're experiencing right now; Ontario families are hurting from this recession. There has been a loss of jobs, and that's why it's incumbent on us, as leaders in this province, to do everything we possibly can to ensure that when our kids look to us 10 years from now, look us in the eyes and say, "Did you do everything in your power when you had the opportunity to act? Did you do everything you could to protect us, to ensure that we inherited an economy that's going to provide us with at least the same opportunities that you had when you were going off to make your way in the world? Did you do that?"—I want to be able to look them in the eyes and say, "Yes, Kennedy, yes, Jordan, when I was in a position where I had an opportunity to make a decision, I did what I had to do, my party did what it had to do, the Premier did what he had to do—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed for 15 minutes.

The House recessed from 1448 to 1503.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I just want to conclude by saying that if ever there was a time that we have to stand up for ourselves, now is the time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: —going to have to keep going, so I will, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll keep talking as long as I need to, because this is an important issue. It's an issue that's important to each and every one of us, and it's important to our constituents, because I think what we need—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is clear there are a couple of principles that guide us when it comes to our work that we do here as legislators.

First of all, we, as members, have privilege, which is well defined within our standing orders and also within the precedents to say that members have the ability to come into this House and to have an opportunity to debate the bills that are before the House, and to represent our constituents.

The second point is that we also have, under the standing orders and, again, under our precedents, the freedom of speech—again, to the same point.

It is fairly clear, as a result of what's happening in the House right now, that the members of the third party are not going to get an opportunity to speak on this bill. We don't like Bill 218; if we had our way, we would scrap it. But that's not the point of this point of order. My point is, I have a right, as do all members of the New Democratic Party, to rise and speak on this bill. This House is in such disorder, it's going to become impossible for us to be able to speak to this bill.

Under section 16 of the standing orders, "In the case of grave disorder in the House, the Speaker or the Chair may adjourn the House or a committee without motion, or suspend any meeting for a time to be named by him or her."

My last point is this: By your doing so to adjourn the House for the rest of today, it would give us, the House leaders, the opportunity to sit down with the government and try to find a way amongst the House leaders to resolve this issue so that at the end we're able to do what needs to be done in this Legislature on behalf of all the constituents we represent.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the member from Timmins–James Bay. I don't disagree with him that we are in a unique situation within this House, and certainly for myself as the presiding officer of this chamber. We have, sitting within the House right now, two members who have been expelled from the chamber. I would have to say that I'm not wanting to, and I'm not prepared to, engage these two members in removing them by force. I don't think that is helpful to anyone.

I am, right now, very prepared to recess the House and ask, if needed, all three House leaders to come and join me in the side office to have a discussion, to see if there is some compromise to move forward. If you do not want the Speaker and the Clerk there, I'm quite happy, but I would encourage the House leaders to use this opportunity to get together.

Hon. Brad Duguid: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I understand the difficult challenge you're in and I understand the concerns of the member opposite, but this is government speaking time right now. We're absolutely pleased to continue the discussions.

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: It would be easier to continue it without the heckles, but—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the member for his interjection, and with that point I am going to recess the House and ask that all three House leaders join me in my side office, please.

The House recessed from 1508 to 1626.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS ACT (LIVE-IN CAREGIVERS AND OTHERS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉTRANGERS DANS LE CADRE DE L'EMPLOI (AIDES FAMILIAUX ET AUTRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 26, 2009, I'm now required to put the question.

On October 26, Mr. Fonseca moved second reading of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 26, 2009, the bill is ordered to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 26, 2009, on the motion for time allocation of Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I was really looking forward to this debate, because I wanted to make a number of points that I believe are important; that is, that in a matter of days this government is going to push a bill on labour mobility out of the way, push it out of public scrutiny, have very little debate, have one afternoon of deputations and it's gone. I find this the most repulsive piece of work done by the Liberals that I have seen in a long, long time.

This is a bill that has serious implications—I will speak to it in a few minutes—and all we are going to get is this time allocation motion that I'm speaking to. On Thursday, we're going to have hearings, meaning very few people have been alerted to the fact that there are going to be hearings for one simple afternoon and it's gone; it's out of sight and no longer debated, and no one will be the wiser. No one has heard about this bill, no one is talking about this bill, it's not in the media and as far as this government is concerned, they're happy about that state of blissful ignorance by the public and by politicians as well. I dare say that the majority of Liberals don't have a clue what this bill implies. They don't have a clue. They haven't read it, will never read it and are happy to be told by their minister, "This is just about labour mobility. Not to worry, there are no other implications. Let's move on."

I have never seen anything like it. I have never seen a government operate in such a manner where we don't get adequate time for hearings.

When Liberals were in opposition, they sounded like New Democrats. They used to attack Mike Harris, as we did, on so many different bills that they would just rush through that place for one afternoon, one day, two days, and they were gone. And you're doing exactly the same with this bill. With this bill, you are doing the very things you decried when you were in opposition. How can you feel good about that? How can Liberals in general feel good about that, and how can left-leaning Liberals feel good about that?

I keep asking, "Where is the left in the Liberal Party?" They must be hiding so tightly under that carpet that they're invisible, creeping under the carpet like slithering serpents. That's what has happened. Because how could you accept this if you were good left-leaning Liberals? How could you not demand in your own caucus that there be adequate hearings and that people be adequately informed about these hearings?

We're debating a closure motion on this bill today, and by Thursday we'll have deputations—three days, Mike. And we say—

Mr. Mike Colle: Tempus fugit.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Tempus fugit; yes, I know—and we say we don't have time?

We have had two major agreements: the trade, investment and labour mobility agreement, called TILMA, between Alberta and British Columbia—and that was done lickety-split as well. That trade agreement is not just about labour mobility. It's about investments; it's about trade. It's about making sure that investors have the right to challenge regulations they disagree with.

The agreement is that I only have 20 minutes to speak—is that it?

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's crazy.

Here's what it says in the Alberta-BC agreement: "Each party shall ensure that its measures do not operate

to restrict or impair trade between or through the territory of the parties, or investment or labour mobility between the parties."

This isn't just about labour mobility. It is ostensibly about labour mobility, but it's really about investments; it's about trade. It's about making sure that the corporations have the power to go where they want, free of any obstacles. That's what this is about. It's not about labour mobility.

People have labour mobility in this country, and the federal government has the power constitutionally to be able to make sure that people are able to move from one province to the other to do what they want to do. It's not about that. The Liberals claim it's about that, because that's all they've been told to say, but it's about trade and it's about investments. And I've got to tell you, the civil servants know that this is what it's about. They know it's about trade over social issues. They know that it's about trade liberalization.

That's why I wanted to be able to have a long opportunity to discuss this—because we need to know that Ontario signed an agreement with Quebec a couple of months ago, called the Ontario-Quebec trade and cooperation agreement. Here's what it says about that: "Each party shall ensure that any measure it adopts or maintains does not operate to create an obstacle to trade, investment and labour mobility between the parties."

It's not just about labour mobility. It's about trade; it's about investments. What that means is that business wants to be able to operate between provinces and to have few restrictions apply to them. That's what this bill is about.

The worst of it is that Ontarians have a right to discuss and debate agreements, and should have the power to be able to change, to modify any of those agreements, based on what they feel strongly about, based on the fact that they might feel that those trade agreements impair their ability to manage their own affairs in Ontario.

These agreements should not have been signed behind closed doors. McGuinty and Monsieur Charest signed an agreement behind closed doors—Jeff, from Peterborough—behind closed doors. How could you accept that and how could you so blindly accept an agreement that you haven't read? I'm assuming that McGuinty told you it's a good agreement. I'm assuming that he must have told you that in a caucus room. But how could you not have had and wished for an opportunity to debate the bill? How could you do that? A fine lot we have of these fine Liberals and left-leaning so-called Liberals in that caucus. Two agreements—Alberta, Quebec and Ontario. The Premiers get together, they sign agreements and it's done. The Speaker doesn't have a clue. The clerks have probably read the bill, because they need to give advice to the Speaker. I haven't had an opportunity to read that bill, most MPPs haven't had an opportunity to read that bill, but it's an agreement that has been signed by two Premiers. And we accept it. How do we do that?

This is the problem that I have with these kinds of bills, because it pretends to be about cross-border business, it pretends to be about labour mobility, but it has to do with trade. If there's a water ban at city hall here that could operate as an obstacle for Quebec-based bottled water companies looking to sell their product, it could be challenged by Quebec. It could be challenged by those corporations. The Quebec government could say, "Sorry, Toronto; you can't say no." You can't say you've got a ban on bottled water, because Quebec says, "We've got a big bottled water company that we want to sell water all over Ontario, to all those municipalities, and we challenge the city of Toronto to be able to do that."

That's what this agreement does. That's why we need to be able to debate these bills, and that's why I wanted to condemn the action of the Liberal Party in doing what it has done, moving closure on debate and moving directly to hearings on Thursday afternoon.

This particular bill is going to hurt not just labour but every other profession that's affected by it. This particular bill pretends that it's just about getting people to move from one province to another and be able to get a job in same field, and it pretends that we are all trained in a similar fashion from one province to the other.

We have the constitutional power as a province to set our own rules, regulations and standards, and what this Premier is doing through this bill is saying that if somebody is coming from Alberta, where they have been trained in some private institution and the regulations are not what they should be, they should, with some modicum of experience, be able to come here and say, "Yes, I need to get that job. Yes, I'm able to do that job," and we don't need to worry about standards because all that matters is that they have some semblance of skills in that particular trade or profession and they can get into the profession or trade here; no problemo.

It puts a tremendous burden on the province that has the higher standard to prove that the person who is coming to our province can do the job, and the problem is, we don't know what standards any other province has. We don't even know in our own province what standards we have, as evidenced by the private colleges that just give out credentials to people as if they were giving them out as candies. Imagine. The Ombudsman has pointed out, over and over again, the little oversight we have over private colleges and the credentials they give out, and now we're about to say to someone from some other province who gets credentials in their trade and/or profession by some private or public institution where the standards are not very good or very high, that they can come and get a job and it's up to us as the province with the higher standard to be able to show that maybe they shouldn't get that job. But even then, the language is very clear about what we can and can't do, and I want to get to it quickly.

1640

Section 9 obliges regulatory authorities to recognize and give effect to authorizing certificates issued in other Canadian jurisdictions—this is the central and most important element of this bill—and provides in part as follows:

"When applicant is certified by out-of-province regulatory authority

"9(1) This section applies if an individual applying to an Ontario regulatory authority for certification in a regulated occupation is already certified in the same occupation by an out-of-province regulatory authority....

"(2) The Ontario regulatory authority shall not require, as a condition of certifying the individual in the regulated occupation, that the individual have, undertake, obtain or undergo any material additional training, experience, examinations or assessments."

They do not have to go through additional training, experience, examination or assessment, and that's what this is about.

Other measures here:

"Every Ontario regulatory authority shall, to the extent possible and where practical....

"(b) take steps to reconcile differences between the occupational standards it has established for an occupation and occupational standards in effect with respect to the same occupation in the other provinces and territories of Canada that are parties to the agreement on internal trade."

"Take steps to reconcile differences": The intent of the bill, where there are differences, is that the government has to take steps to reconcile the differences between the occupational standards. It doesn't matter whether some province has standards that are not up to par; it is our responsibility as the receiving province with a higher standard to make sure we reconcile the differences, and there's nothing we can or should do that could be construed as preventing that person from getting into that trade and/or profession.

That's what this bill is about. It's about more than just labour mobility—I only mention those examples where there are some exceptions, but the language makes it very clear that what this is about is making sure that anybody can move from one place to the other irrespective of standards because the job of the bill is to make sure we reconcile differences and that we do nothing to prevent someone from getting into that particular job.

But beyond that, the effect of this is to make sure that we break down our provincial constitutional powers that we have to protect what is constitutionally ours, whether it be health, parts of the environment, all of the contracts we give away from municipalities and the provincial government. We give up all those things that we control locally and open it up to whomever.

This is about making sure that as the government negotiates an agreement—the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement—as we do those agreements with Europe, we are willing to give up our local procurement strength and policies that we have. It's about eliminating all those protections we have had under NAFTA for a long time. Under NAFTA, provinces have the constitutional power to exclude themselves from trade agreements that are within our jurisdiction.

What this is about is making sure we get rid of those provincial and city powers. It is about making sure we are in agreement with world trade agreements. It's about America, through Obama, urging Canada to sign up to the World Trade Organization agreement on government procurement, which would permanently remove the remaining abilities of local governments to determine how taxpayers spend their money.

I know that some members look inquisitively at me about that, or look as if they're confused and imagine it can't be what I'm talking about, but this is what it is. It is about making sure that we make deals with Europe, and making sure that we break down the trade barriers, that we eliminate our power to control locally what we produce. That is the effect of this bill.

We need debate. We need lots of debate. We need more and more people to know what this is about. We need the Premier of this province to talk to us about the agreement he signed with Quebec. Why has he signed an agreement on his own without any debate? And why are we pushing this bill through in one afternoon with deputants not even knowing we are going to be debating this thing on Thursday, and the amendments have to be in literally by that time so we can do clause-by-clause on Monday next? This is insane. I've never seen anything like it.

Mr. Paul Miller: How many trades are involved?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Loads of trades are involved.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Deputy House leader, if you've got strong arguments to make, you need to be able to take the time and debate. And House leader, you've given us a mere 20 minutes to debate this on closure; it's all we've got. It just isn't right. We need to be able to have hearings that allow people from across the province to come and depute and debate. We need the public to hear about this bill. The public doesn't even know what we're dealing with in this House.

I have to tell you that I condemn, in the strongest of terms, what this government has done with this particular bill. Your desire to get it out of sight and out of mind is objectionable and has to be condemned strongly. All I had was a brief amount of time to put this on the record, and it won't do justice to the bill, because we simply don't have enough time to deal with it. But this bill, which eliminates the ability of governments to favour local companies and workers—it's simply one of the most objectionable elements of this bill, and every other bill that has been dealt with in Canada in the last short while, which includes the bills I mentioned. It's all part of the grand strategy of the Agreement on Internal Trade that was passed in 1995. Everything seems to be done on the basis of falling in line with the Agreement on Internal Trade signed by the then federal Liberals in 1995, and all these bills are just falling into line quickly without any debate. Objectionable, I tell you Liberals, and any Liberal who has ever felt left-leaning and can accept this kind of arrangement within their own party should be condemned too.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

On November 26, Mr. Milloy moved government notice of motion 163. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House is recessed until 6:45 this evening.

The House recessed from 1648 to 1845.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margarett R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Government
Publications

No. 194B

Nº 194B

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 30 November 2009

Lundi 30 novembre 2009

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 30 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 30 novembre 2009

The House recessed from 1648 to 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to arrange this evening's business as follows:

The first order of business will be Bill 177, and we will follow that up with Bill 179;

There will be 30 minutes apportioned equally among the recognized parties allotted to the debate of each of these orders of business, following which the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of each item of business; and

Following completion of both orders of business, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without question put until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members have heard the motion as read. Agreed? Agreed.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES ET LA GOUVERNANCE DES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Ms. Smith, on behalf of Ms. Wynne, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne le rendement des élèves, la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Higher levels of student achievement is our government's top priority in education. Good governance by our trustees and directors of education is necessary to support higher levels of student achievement. That's why we introduced the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act to support them in their important roles.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the educators and parents who presented at the committee hearings that we held recently. Our approach to publicly funded education has been and will always be one of respect, collaboration and consultation with our education partners. The legislation before the House tonight reflects much of our education partners' input and demonstrates our respectful and collaborative approach.

The proposed amendments to the Education Act, if passed, would make student achievement the number one priority for all school boards.

In 1998, the previous government introduced legislation that fundamentally changed the publicly funded education system in Ontario. That bill, however, did not address the necessary changes to the governance structures within school boards. Since then, several major reports have called for a governance review to see if the structures in place are operating as effectively as they should.

In fact, we assembled the governance review committee—which had broad participation from school boards from all sectors—to examine how well the current governance structure is serving Ontario's education system. The committee's report found strengths in the current system, but it also identified some areas for improvement. This legislation was designed to address many of the committee's recommendations, and it demonstrates our government's high level of respect for trustees, school boards and directors of education.

The proposed legislation would clarify the roles and responsibilities of school boards, trustees, board chairs and directors of education. It would build on good governance practices and promote sound financial management by authorizing regulations respecting audit committees and trustee codes of conduct. The proposed legislation provides a mechanism for school boards to enforce their codes of conduct. These are all tools that will help boards to govern themselves more effectively.

School board leadership plays an important role in student learning. Bill 177 clearly states that boards are responsible for promoting student achievement and well-being. One change would involve direction on handling board resources effectively. This would help ensure that board resources are managed wisely, that effective education programs are delivered and that students are encouraged to pursue their goals.

1850

Other changes highlight the important leadership role that board chairs have, like conducting meetings

according to the board's procedures and practices, acting as spokesperson to the public and providing leadership to keep the board focused on its strategic plan. While these are all common practice in existing boards, they've never been formally legislated and defined before.

Trustees play a valuable role in supporting local decision-making. Bill 177 would strengthen their role by ensuring, among other things, that they contribute to the collective goals of the board, participate in board meetings and committee meetings, consult with parents and students and constituents on the board's plan, and bring the concerns of parents, students and constituents to the board's attention. Trustees would maintain their focus on student achievement and well-being.

We held committee hearings and we heard from a broad range of education stakeholders. In response to that, there were a number of amendments made to the bill. In fact, the amendments in many cases were unanimously proposed by all three parties, because all three parties were, of course, hearing the same input.

To give you a flavour of some of the things that we've changed as a result of the amendments: Interestingly, the Education Act has never had a purpose clause, which, given that it's a book this thick, is a little bit surprising. We had proposed a purpose clause. But Martha Mackinnon of Justice for Children and Youth and some of the democracy advocates here in Toronto said, "You really haven't reflected, in the role of public education, its role in strengthening democracy." That hit a particular resonating note with me.

If we reflect back to the father of public education here in Ontario, Egerton Ryerson's thinking on having a publicly funded education system was that having a literate, educated society was one of the foundations of a democratic society. We have amended the purpose clause to reflect that by inserting the requirement that public education build a civil society. So the opening purpose of public education is, "A strong public education system is the foundation of a prosperous, caring and civil society."

On the more technical side, one of the things that we heard from a number of stakeholders was that if we are going to change the roles of school trustees, who are democratically elected by electors in their own communities, we need to come to the Legislature to do this; that this is a very important change. So with the unanimous consent of all parties, we deleted a clause that would have allowed, in the original bill, that to be done by regulation. It will now require legislation. That was a suggestion made by a variety of stakeholders.

When we looked at the duties of boards, it was pointed out by some boards that the duties of the boards didn't actually include monitoring and evaluating the performance of the director of education, one of the primary responsibilities of the elected board of education. So we made amendments to reflect that all boards are responsible for setting up a monitoring and evaluation system of their chief executive officer, the director of education.

One of the things that some of the stakeholders pointed out was that in the duties of the board, although we had always assumed that the duties of the board are to uphold the Education Act, that was never explicitly stated. So we introduced a clause that said, "A member of a board shall ... carry out his or her responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under this act, the regulations and the guidelines issued under this act, including but not limited to the board's duties under section 169.1" to clarify that everything must be done in accordance with the act.

Some trustees were concerned that the wording that had been initially proposed might be interfering with their freedom to dissent. We clarified that the requirement in the duties of members is to uphold implementation and that, in fact, they are still free to speak out in dissent if they disagree with a decision. They are still free to bring motions of reconsideration. They simply must not interfere with the actual implementation of a decision once it has been democratically made.

We made it clear that the duties of board members include entrusting the day-to-day management of the board to its staff through the board's director of education, because it's important that the board focus on its role of student achievement, policy setting and fiscal accountability, rather than intervening in day-to-day management of the schools.

That will give you a little bit of a flavour of the sort of things that we did implement. We respect that trustees do play a valuable role and that we need to make sure that continues. In fact, all partners in the education system have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing the gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

That's why we passed Bill 78, the student performance bill, two years ago. There are still some pieces that we need to deal with coming out of that act as well. What I want to do tonight is commit that as we implement this act and Bill 78, we will continue to consult extensively with our education partners.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure to be debating this evening. I think it's only fair for me to comment firstly on two courageous colleagues of mine, the members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington—it's the longest name ever. We're here tonight in a truncated way because they're speaking up for taxpayers in Ontario.

We're talking about Bill 177. As we talk about Bill 177, one only needs to look at the front of the bill. This bill was introduced for first reading on May 7, 2009—six months ago. This bill was introduced six months ago, and only now are we getting to third reading. Yet two weeks ago, this Liberal government decided to ram through the Ontario Legislature the largest single sales tax increase in Ontario's history without adequate public consultation and without the support of a majority of Ontarians.

That's a problem because in six months they've debated on Bill 177, and it hasn't even done the job it's

supposed to do. You'll recall I had a bill that you supported, Madam Speaker, Bill 130, which would have created mandatory reporting in our schools. Unfortunately, Bill 177 was sort of a circling of the wagons on the issue that was raised by my colleague from Burlington, Joyce Savoline, and also my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa, Christine Elliott. Those two women fought tirelessly in this Legislature for mandatory reporting so that child-on-child abuse in the schools would be adequately reported. Instead, what the Liberals have done over six months of—who knows what they've been doing, but over the last six months they've angered teachers, they have angered trustees and they have angered parents, because they did nothing to resolve the issue that we first brought up.

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But it brings me again to Bill 218, a bill that we expect to have a fulsome public discussion on. Yet they have at every step of the way refused to allow us to participate in a debate not only amongst legislators—which they have, by the way, refused, because they continue to call for time allocation; their most recent time allocation bill was nothing more than draconian. We have not had an adequate ability to debate that fully in this chamber. We have not had that ability to take it across Ontario to various communities so that taxpayers, whether they're middle-income moms and dads, soccer moms, hockey dads or Ontario seniors; whether they're a small business person or a doctor, a physician who is operating a clinic—there was no public debate for them. That was only, of course, in a two-week span—because when you're dealing with the second-largest tax increase that the government has brought in, but the largest single sales tax increase in the province's history, Mr. McGuinty thinks that you shouldn't even have debate on that.

In fact, it's six months that this bill has basically sat idle, and they're just getting around to it now. It speaks to their priorities. To me, if you really want to talk about child safety in the school system, it would have been more urgent. Dealing with the large single sales tax issue that we're dealing with with the HST—they should have actually done what Brian Mulroney did: He spoke to almost 300 people before he rammed the GST through. I can't even say "rammed it through"; it took three months. With these guys here, if we get through three weeks of debate on the HST in Ontario, we'll be lucky. But they just want to nail taxpayers.

Mr. Robert Bailey: They can't wait to do it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They just can't wait to do it.

It brings me back to my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I can tell you one thing: There is a big difference between the two of them and backbenchers over here. I can tell you that. They'll speak up for their people, and I've already had the tremendous opportunity to speak to my constituents in Nepean–Carleton, who support them, who appreciate the fact that they're standing up for the people of this province. It's a special type of courage that those two gentlemen have. I can tell you that they're standing up for the people that they represent and the people that the Liberal backbenchers represent.

I just see, over this period of time, that today was a very interesting day in the Legislature, something more than I've ever experienced. I'm sure it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But in our capacity—and we have tremendous resolve in the Progressive Conservative caucus, and that's why we're going to continue to support these two gentlemen. Not only that, but we're going to continue to say that Bill 177 is not adequate. We're not going to support it. If there was ever an example of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, it's Bill 177. My colleague from Burlington, our former education critic, will tell you that. She has met time and time again with school boards and educators and parents who are opposed to the way this McGuinty government has been mishandling child-on-child or student-on-student abuse.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Maybe you didn't notice, Lisa; Liz Witmer's your critic.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You know, it's really hard, Madam Speaker, to speak among the heckles. I'm going to continue because I have tremendous resolve. If the member from Guelph actually wanted to say something reasonable and useful in this chamber, she'd oppose the HST, like her constituents do. I can tell you, we're getting the correspondence, the petitions, the letters and the e-mails from her riding. They don't support the HST.

In fact, the other thing is—we're dealing with an act to amend the Education Act—these Liberals can't even get it right. First of all, we're dealing with a $25-billion deficit, and what are they doing? They're bringing in universal daycare. They're bringing in the daycare for—what is it?—$1.5 billion. They're also trying to change the Education Act in the HST bill. We, of course, have asked for that to be severed, but they've put the Education Act changes into the HST bill. Then we've got this education act, Bill 177. What I don't understand is why you can't get it right and can't do it all at the same time. I guess why that is is because the HST act, all you would like to do, Ms. Sandals, is ram it through and any changes that you don't like and Ontarians don't like—it doesn't matter because you're going to hide it. You're going to cover it under the dark of night like they're doing tonight, keeping us here until midnight. That's why my colleagues from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington are opposed to what this Liberal government is doing.

If they wanted to have a fulsome debate on education in the province, Bill 177, the education component in Bill 218 and their full-day kindergarten/universal daycare, they would actually have that. They would hold public hearings in Ontario about that very issue, but they refuse to, like they refuse to on Bill 218, because they can't get it right. They can't get administration right; they can't get taxation right.

In fact, I heard a rumour that they're probably going to be turfed out of office in two years. It's going around like wildfire, that rumour.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I must say again that it's so difficult to speak among all the heckles by the Liberal members. I try so hard. As meek and mild as my personality is, I try to collect my thoughts and speak about the seriousness of Bill 177, but you choose instead to drown my small, feeble voice out.

As I close with my last 29 seconds about this bill, Bill 177 is not the answer. It is not the solution. We'll be voting against it, and we're going to continue to call for public hearings on the HST. We're going to continue to call for public hearings on the changes they're making to the Education Act that they're not telling Ontarians about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's really going to be hard to summarize this bill in 10 minutes because normally you need more time to deal with this bill, the Minister of Education and the parliamentary assistant—normally half an hour, but really an hour is what you need—really. I'm going to do my best.

I've got to tell you, there are three pieces of legislation this government has introduced that I detest. First, the harmonized sales tax is going to whack the middle class like we've never seen before. That's the first offensive thing this government has done. They're getting rid of progressive income taxes, which they are proud of doing, which they announce every day, and they're introducing flat taxes, i.e., the harmonized 8% sales tax on a whole lot of services like funeral services, gasoline, hydro, vitamins and so on. The list is long. That is the biggest one.

The second one is labour mobility, which this government is rushing through in the space of just a couple of weeks. Nobody even knows what the bill is about. It has nothing to do with labour mobility. It's got to do with trade liberalization and extension of NAFTA, and that's what the bill is about. The Liberals want to hide that under the carpet as best as they can, and they want to get rid of it as fast as they can. That's the second most offensive bill they have introduced in this Legislature, which they're killing by Thursday.

The third is this bill, Bill 177. I don't know how many fine Liberals have read this bill because if you hear the parliamentary assistant, you think it's a good bill. If you didn't know any better you would say this is about trustees; this is a bill that helps trustees. This is the most offensive piece of legislation that trustees have ever, ever seen, but the parliamentary assistant from Guelph makes it appear like this is about them; it's about helping them. If you listen to her, she is helping the trustees. This bill is not about trustees. This bill is about her and the Minister of Education, and it's about how you belittle and diminish trustees as best as you can.

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Nobody could have done better, not even Mike Harris. Not even Mike Harris could have done better than the parliamentary assistant and the Minister of Education did. Mike Harris would have been proud of this bill. And when you hear Liberals introducing this bill, you've got to worry. When Kathleen Wynne, a progressive trustee, introduces this bill along with the parliamentary assistant, you have got to worry. It is the worst piece of legislation I have ever seen and/or read and/or debated.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: David Zimmer, the member from Willowdale, was there. He knows. He's a lawyer, by the way; I think he reads bills more than some others. He was there.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Rosie, I've read every word of that bill.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The parliamentary assistant has read every word of this bill. The first part of this bill that this parliamentary assistant has read, God bless her, is the purpose. This bill is divided into two parts: one, the purpose; and the second, which I will get to, has to do about governance—and it has nothing whatsoever to do with governance.

It all has to do with the purpose of this bill, which is the first part: "All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education systems."

Mrs. Liz Sandals: And that's bad?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to get to it, Parliamentary Assistant.

This bill is about achievement, which is test scores. This government, through the parliamentary assistant and the minister, is obsessed with test scores; that's all they give a hoot about—test scores. It's not about the whole child; it's not how the whole child learns. It's about how that child does on that test score and about school boards delivering on student achievement, and that's it. It does not say anything—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Guelph, order.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's okay.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Well-being, Rosie. It's about students' well-being.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Well-being, yeah, and test scores is all she cares about. It's about the test scores, and that's it. The student does not exist outside of the test scores; that is it.

And "closing gaps" means that teachers and boards are all having to devote their energies to closing gaps through the test scores. It's got nothing to do with the parliamentary assistant or the minister giving money and/or support to those poor teachers who have to deal with mental illness, who have to deal with poverty issues. She was a trustee. She was in charge of OPSBA—she

was. She was active and should know better, and she defends this crap.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's not so bad, because that's what this bill is.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Could you retract that and call it fertilizer?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I take it back immediately, because I've only got five minutes. I take it back.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I took it back. I already withdrew my comment.

Mr. Mike Colle: Say "withdraw."

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, stop the clock.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Stop the clock, please. Could you withdraw?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So the purpose of this bill is test scores and nothing else; they don't care about kids in any other way. They don't learn in any other way except through the test scores, and poor boards and teachers have got to do the job of dealing with kids who've got so many problems on their own. Nowhere—nowhere—did this ministry say, through the parliamentary assistant, "Teachers, we're going to give you the resources you need to deal with kids who've got so many different problems." And when we introduced that amendment, she didn't support it. That's the first one.

The second one: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards." That was the most offensive piece of legislation.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We deleted that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Even they voted against it, because they realized how bad and dumb and stupid it was.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We agreed. Everybody agreed. We deleted it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They got rid of it, and even she agreed with it. I couldn't believe it.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We all agreed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: All right. Will you be quiet? I've got three minutes.

So they voted against it.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Guelph, order, please.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Be quiet. I've only got three minutes.

The next offensive thing: "ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources ... deliver effective and appropriate education programs...." As if boards don't do that. The government gives them money, and they deliver the best programs they can. This part on page 3 makes it seem like the boards are just wasting billions of dollars that they don't get from these people. They make it appear that boards are frivolously spending money that should be going to the poor students, and they're not; they're going into their own pockets.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Twenty billion dollars.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Please. The parliamentary assistant, with all the experience she's got, tries to say so much about so little.

"Every board shall effectively ... use the resources entrusted to it for the purposes of delivering effective and appropriate education." As if boards do anything but that.

The other one: A member shall "attend and participate in meetings of the board." What do trustees do except attend meetings? Is that a problem? No. That's what they do. Why state the obvious? It's so dumb—dumb.

"Consult with parents." What do trustees do except consult with parents? It's dumb to put it in. "Bring concerns of parents, students and supporters" to the board. That's what trustees do. It's dumb to put it in as "Conduct of members of school boards." This is their duty. Do you get it? It's treating trustees like little kids. It's utterly stupid to do that.

The other one: "Support the implementation of any board resolution." They change the word from "support" to "uphold." Why do that? Why is it that you feel the need to say that? "Refrain from interfering in the day-to-day management of the board." What is it that trustees do? They are elected. They are supposed to represent parents, and that sometimes means interfering. I say to the parliamentary assistant, who used to be a trustee a long time ago, what is wrong with that?

My God, there's so much. With 10 minutes, I have one minute left; I can't believe it.

Then they have another section which talks about how chairs of the board shall represent the interests of the board. It says it provides that the chair of the board shall "act as spokesperson to the public on behalf of the board, unless otherwise determined by the board." Only chairpeople represent the interest of the board. What happens to trustees? Why do we need them? Why do we elect them? That's what this government, through this minister, has done. Why do we need elected trustees with this bill?

This is one of the worst pieces of legislation I have ever seen. It is bad, dumb politics. It hurts trustees; it belittles trustees. Liberal MPPs should be elected out of office, and they should get unelected soon. I can't wait.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Ms. Smith has moved third reading of Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES

Ms. Matthews moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 179, An Act to amend various Acts related to regulated health professions and certain other Acts / Projet de loi 179, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les professions de la santé réglementées et d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Now we recognize Ms. Matthews for a short statement.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much. I am delighted to be able to be here tonight to kick off third reading debate for Bill 179, the Regulated Health Professions Statute Law Amendment Act, 2009. I would like to begin by thanking all of the people who worked collaboratively to make this bill a reality. I'd like to thank Barbara Sullivan, the chair of the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, all the members of the council, those who contributed to the HPRAC process, and all the people who made submissions and were part of the debate around this bill. I would also like to pay a special thanks to my parliamentary assistant, Bas Balkissoon, for his dedicated and collaborative work on this bill.

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If passed in third reading, the bill would support the government's HealthForceOntario health human resources strategy, ensuring that Ontarians have access to the right number and mix of qualified health care providers now and in the future by increasing patient access by better utilizing health professionals and reducing barriers to their practice, and by improving patient safety by strengthening the health professional regulatory system. In short, if passed, the bill would mean access to safe, high-quality health care in more places.

Let me give you some examples. Instead of waiting in the emergency room to see a physician, a fracture could be set by a skilled nurse practitioner. Need an inhaler refilled? The pharmacist could do that in one trip, instead of two trips: one to the doctor and then one to the pharmacist. A physiotherapist could order an X-ray to better examine the cause of knee pain. A dietitian could take blood samples from patients to check blood glucose levels.

The proposed amendments affect several professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act—the Nursing Act, for example—and would expand the scope of practice for various health professionals. It would increase access to health care for Ontarians by allowing nurse practitioners, pharmacists, physiotherapists, dietitians, midwives and medical radiation technologists to deliver more services that they are now qualified to provide. It would increase access by changing the rules for administering, prescribing, dispensing and selling drugs in practice for chiropodists and podiatrists, dental hygienists, dentists, midwives, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, physiotherapists and respiratory therapists. It would also remove restrictions on X-rays that can be ordered by nurse practitioners and enable physiotherapists to order X-rays for specific purposes.

If passed, Bill 179 would allow all of these regulated health professionals to better utilize their hard-earned skills and training. We want all health care professionals to have the opportunity to give their best, to give all Ontarians the very best care.

Based on the recommendations made by HPRAC, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, we're taking steps to better utilize all of Ontario's health professionals. The proposed legislation will increase teamwork among all regulated professions and build on existing highly successful team environments like nurse-practitioner-led clinics and family health teams.

The proposed changes are all about putting more tools in the hands of people who are at the front line of health care delivery. It would help promote a health care system that is more efficient and more easily adaptable to new technologies. Timely care is good for patients; that goes without saying. It's also good for the health care system as a whole, having our health care workforce work better together.

The standing committee conducted public hearings, and as a result made amendments to the bill with respect to certain professions. Some of those amendments include amendments to the Nursing Act, 1991, which would remove restrictions on the drugs that nurse practitioners could prescribe, dispense, compound and sell. It would authorize registered nurses and registered practical nurses, in certain situations, to dispense drugs that have been prescribed for patients. Amendments to the Social Work and Social Service Work Act would authorize appropriately educated members of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to use the title "doctor," subject to certain restrictions.

Bill 179 would support our goal of reducing emergency room wait times in a number of ways. More health care providers, hopefully with expanded roles, delivering better front-line primary care is a critical component of any emergency room strategy. It means that Ontarians are better able to manage chronic diseases like diabetes, which means we would see fewer people with diabetes in our ERs. It means that Ontarians with mental health challenges get the care they need without having to visit an emergency room. All of this cuts down on emergency room traffic in our hospitals.

While we know there is a long road ahead, we remember that in the past year alone we have reduced ER wait times by nearly an hour overall. Our job is to build on this success while maintaining a steadfast focus on our government's two biggest health care priorities: reducing wait times, especially in our emergency rooms, and increasing access to family health care.

We're working hard to restore Ontarians' trust, and to show them that we're building a health care system for the future and that we're spending their tax dollars wisely. The people of Ontario expect both a strong health care system and fiscal responsibility. The proposed changes to Bill 179, making the best possible use of all the members of the health care team, will go a long way in addressing both.

I would like to thank members of all three parties who were part of the committee hearings. We had amendments from all parties, and I'm really proud of this piece of work. I think it demonstrates that when we do work collaboratively, we can really do good work for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I am privileged again to rise tonight to debate another bill, and I'm very, very pleased to be able to do that.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Listen to my colleagues opposite. There is just no respect for this chamber anymore.

Bill 179 is an interesting piece of legislation. Of course, it was introduced last May. It not only went through first reading last May; it also went through second reading. Here we are six months later in third reading. A lot of work has indeed been done, and a lot of work, we must remember, took us to this place. While the first two readings of Bill 179 went through this chamber and then to committee, the entire Ministry of Health was sidetracked by something called eHealth, the $1-billion waste of money. A boondoggle is what it's called by the taxpayers of the province.

While that happened, of course—someone correct me if I'm wrong, but this probably went through two or three Ministers of Health before this bill was finally completed. I'm pretty pleased to be able to say that my colleagues in the official opposition—under the leadership of Tim Hudak and also Christine Elliott, our health critic—will support this bill.

But as my colleague Christine Elliott will say, the devil is in the details, and our support for this bill is qualified. Why is it qualified? There's a series of reasons that she has outlined here. As with all things, she does believe that the purpose and intent of Bill 179 and its many provisions are sound. She also believes there are many opportunities lost in Bill 179 that were either overlooked or ignored by legitimate concerns of several health care professionals, meaning that many options to make significant positive change have not been realized. My colleague used the term in her remarks, "the devil is in the detail."

If you look at—

Mr. David Zimmer: The devil is in the Tory caucus.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think you ought to rescind that comment. I think you ought to take that back.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Willowdale.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The devil is in the detail. Bill 218, much like Bill 179, is all in the detail. That Bill 218, the HST legislation, has several pieces of legislation that need to be severed so that we can actually have a legitimate debate. But no, they will refuse to severe that legislation. They are ramming through this legislation, and that's why the devil is in the detail.

My colleague from Willowdale says the devil is in the Tories, which I resent. I actually think the Speaker should demand that he apologize. He refuses to because that's how they decided to debate the Progressive Conservative caucus: through slander and through insults.

One of our biggest concerns in 179 has been echoed by several health care professionals, just like eHealth was echoed by Ontario taxpayers. Of course, Bill 218, the HST bill, is echoed by Ontario taxpayers.

One of those big sections was 24 of the bill and its amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991. The government's amendments add a new statutory official under the act known as college supervisor. Subsection 5.0.1(1) provides that "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint a person as a college supervisor" on the recommendation of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This allows the government to appoint a college supervisor on the recommendation of the minister when the minister deems it appropriate, and how and for how long the minister sees fit to fulfill duties assigned by the minister.

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Now, in committee, we were advised by the minister's parliamentary assistant that this provision was intended to ensure that, "The supervisor will be appointed in cases where the college has failed to carry out a request made by the minister." With all due respect, the mandate of the professional college is not to carry out the wishes of the minister.

But that's when we all must rewind the tape and look back at what has happened from May throughout the summer of scandal that the McGuinty Liberals had and see that everything in the health department was done as a result of what those ministers wanted—whether it was right for Ontario or not. We've only have to look at some of the scandals with eHealth, the political direction there and the fact that Mr. McGuinty actually hand-picked Ms. Kramer to sit as the CEO of eHealth. We must only look at the fact that Alan Hudson was his own personal health adviser. We must not look very much further to find out that some of the key players in the eHealth spectacle were former assistants to the previous Minister of Health.

Indeed, the mandate is to carry out the wishes of the Minister of Health. We, on this side of the House, are very concerned with that, given their lacklustre performance over the past six years. In keeping with the theme of undermining the power of the colleges, the measure that was introduced without consultation—and without consultation, I might add, is why my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and my other college from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound are standing here today to make a public point. Peaceful—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Peaceful?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's peaceful. They're making a peaceful demonstration within a chamber of democracy. They're choosing to sit here and protest the draconian measures of this current government.

But let's get back to Bill 179, because in keeping the theme of undermining the colleges without consultation, the government's change to the Regulated Health Professions Statute Law Amendment Act has raised serious concerns for the College of Nurses of Ontario and the Ontario Dental Association, the College of Dietitians of Ontario, the College of Chiropodists of Ontario and others. After hearing the heated opposition to the provision, we in the Progressive Conservative caucus introduced an alternative in clause-by-clause review, which represented a compromise between the government's motion and the concerns of the colleges. This proposed amendment would have provided safeguards against government intrusion into the affairs of colleges and mitigated the impact of government interference.

Again, I think it speaks to the pattern that has developed over there, this pattern of behaviour where it's "Do as I say," direction from the minister which is obviously coming from the Premier, and public consultation be damned—talk to the stakeholders and the taxpayers and the patients of this province only after this legislation has been passed and its negative effects have been seen. Rather than do the right thing and fulfill its obligations and commitments to the people of the province of Ontario, they are abusing their power.

Bill 218: they are refusing to hold public hearings. More than that, we've had Bill 218 on the books for less than three weeks, yet old Bill 179 has been withering out there for six months with first reading back in May, second reading back in May, and here we are, six months later, presumably only because they've been dealing with the crisis at eHealth and the $1 billion that they flushed down the toilet that was intended for patient care. We're back here; we're dealing with this legislation now. But we're not dealing effectively with HST. That's why my colleagues from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington are holding a peaceful demonstration within the Ontario Legislature tonight. That's why the PC caucus is united in its resolve to support them. And that's why we're going to continue to fight tooth and nail for these guys to do the right thing: actually hold adequate public hearings on legislation and make sure that you do your due diligence—not just introduce something, forget about it and six months later deal with it, and not just introduce it within three weeks and limit public debate. There has to be a happy medium. They have never found it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? Further debate?

M^me^ France Gélinas: Merci, madame la Présidente, for your numerous calls there. It is my pleasure to speak about Bill 179. Bill 179 has to do with amendments to various acts, and basically it is to recognize the scope of practice of the different health professionals here in Ontario. If we are serious that we're going to move forward with an integrated team approach to health care, we have to let each and every one of those professionals practise within their scope of practice. Only then will we achieve the benefit of interdisciplinary care the way it should be available to the people of Ontario. It will improve health.

Bill 179 makes some concrete steps for some of the professions in some of the scopes of practice, so it is a step in the right direction. But you have to realize that some of those professionals have waited a decade to see changes to their scope of practice, and they need that much change and they get an inch. Sure, they're happy that they've got those little changes to their scope of practice, but what they wanted was to be able to practise to their full scope, to let the people of Ontario know what they're able to offer and to help make them healthier. So they came in droves. We had to have three days of hearings. We gave those associations, those colleges, 10 minutes each. That's it; that's all. They had to spit it all out in 10 minutes, tell us everything that needed to change with Bill 179, and we did that for three days straight, 10 minutes at a time. This is how many changes they wanted. That's for three days; we listened and we listen. We listened to good ideas that were well formulated, that really showed, with best practice to support, that if we were to make those changes, the health of Ontarians would improve; the health care system would run more smoothly.

Then we tried to put amendments forward. We put 89 amendments forward. I can tell you that zero—yes, you can count them, zero—NDP amendments got voted for. The government had it set in their head that this was what was to be given to those professionals. It didn't matter what they brought forward for amendment; it didn't matter how convincing their arguments were. We often had the professional college working with the association, working with the teaching institution, all showing us that it is safe, that it would improve public health, that it would make our system work better, but to no avail. The government had their agenda and they stuck to it. They made little steps for some of the health care professionals that had waited for such a long time. For the rest of them, they will have to wait. I hope they're not going to have to wait for another decade, but chances are they will, because those kinds of bills don't come about very often.

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To look at it in more detail, I'd like to talk about nurses for a while. Nurses are the only 24/7 bedside professionals in our hospitals. They have so much that they know and that they can offer, but when we limit them because we limit their scope of practice, it's like an opportunity wasted. We see all of that talent, all of that knowledge, gone to nothing because we don't allow them, if they have the appropriate education or knowledge, to cast simple fractures or dislocations; we wouldn't do this. We allow them to dispense, but we don't allow them to compound and sell drugs, to communicate a diagnosis, to prescribe forms of energy. It doesn't matter that their college said that they could do that safely, that their association said that the profession

was ready, that the universities and colleges say that they teach this, and that nurses can do this in a safe fashion. The government didn't listen. They had their set agenda and they stuck to it.

The same thing with expanding the scope of practice for nurse practitioners: Did it change? Yes, it did change, and alleluia; I'm really happy. But here again, we came short of giving them their full scope of practice. We have an opportunity at some time in the future to maybe give them full prescribing. To prescribe from a list is ridiculous. Drugs change so quickly that you are forever trying to update that list. So now the government has opened the door to say, "Maybe we'll look at it in regulation." We need to act now. As new nurse-practitioner-led clinics are rolling out, those professionals need to be able to work within their full scope of practice—not at some point in the future, once we've had the process to look at regulations, and maybe if the stars align with seven moons we'll get there. We had an opportunity to do this right here, right now, but we didn't do that. So those professionals will continue to wait and prescribe from a list that will forever be outdated, and I will be forever arguing that in order to do their job properly, they need full prescribing.

I want to talk about pharmacists and remote dispensing. There's a lot of uncertainty about remote dispensing, but the government is moving ahead. We want a simple thing. Let's define what "dispensing" means. Let's make it clear what we mean when we say "remote dispensing" and let's make it clear what we mean by "remote," so that the urge for profit does not trump quality of care. But none of that was listened to.

We also ask that the profession be given the right to distinguish between commercial marketing campaigns and health promotion campaigns, because sometimes there's money to be made by promoting what looks like health promotion but really is only a disguised marketing campaign. No, we're not going to be allowed to do this, so we will continue to see this.

There was a list of what we would have liked pharmacists to be able to do—prescribing for minor ailments; schedule 1 prophylactics; prescribing products for chronic disease management. We made a little step in the right direction, but never the full scope of practice that would allow pharmacists, who know so much about drugs and dispensing—but we put them in handcuffs so that we cannot get their full scope of practice, and the health care system or their patients cannot benefit from their knowledge and skills.

About midwives: There are about 480 midwives, and they deliver about 10% of the babies in Ontario. The care that midwives give is equal to none. Women love getting their care from midwives. But here again, we needed modification for midwives. Midwives should not be prescribing from a list. We need them to be prescribing from categories of drugs so that as drugs change but they are within the same categories, midwives would be allowed to use them. But no, we're stuck with a list that is forever outdated and that is forever in need of change. We made some little steps forward, but why can we not take a full step forward, a full step that will recognize that those professionals can really bring about a change to our health care system? They can bring about better health for their patients and allow us to benefit from all of their hard work and knowledge. But no, we'll have to stay on our appetite for this.

The same thing goes on with dietitians, who still won't be allowed to give diets in hospitals without a doctor's signature.

We made some movement forward with naturopaths in terms of prescribing, but here again they're not allowed to ask for a lab test. Well, lots of what a naturopath does needs to be monitored through blood tests, but here we go again: We'll have to send you back to your primary care physician or nurse practitioner so that the naturopathic doctor can do his or her work.

I want to talk about the appointment of supervisors. I don't know where this idea comes from, but it is such a bad idea that I can't say enough bad about it.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's offensive.

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is offensive, exactly.

The colleges are independent. They are there to protect the public, and we should let them do their work. For the government to assign itself the power to assign a supervisor to an independent body is completely ridiculous, and I still don't understand why we have this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you.

Ms. Matthews has moved third reading of Bill 179, An Act to amend various Acts related to regulated health professions and certain other Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Pursuant to the order of the House earlier this evening, I do now adjourn the House until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1946.

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Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
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Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
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Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margarett R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
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